



BOYS AT CHEQUASSET

MRS. A. D. WHITNEY

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BOYS AT CHEQUASSET;

OR,

"A LITTLE LEAVEN."

BY

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“A LITTLE LEAVEN.”

CHAPTER I.

OFF TO THE COUNTRY.

THE Osburn family was in all the bustle of moving. Delightful bustle! better than any possible perfect order to ten-years-old Johnnie, who stood, at seven in the morning, on his father's door-step, in Pinckney Street, watching the great van, or furniture-wagon, upon which was piled, and being piled, an apparently confused mass of boxes, baskets, chairs, tables, bedding, and all the multifarious plenishing of a long-established household.

Behind him, doors stood open away through the house; and bare floors, littered with straw, from the packing of the big crates in the

china-closet, bundles of carpeting, trunks of clothing, buckets and barrels from the store-room, occupying every possible bit of space, offered a strange vista to the view.

John had not been standing still long. He had been up and “helping,” since six o’clock; sometimes quite effectually, and sometimes the wrong way.

“We’ve *got* to go to-night, father,” he said, gleefully, as Mr. Osburn came out to the door-way, “for the beds are all off.”

“Yes,” his father answered; “we shall sleep in Chequasset to-night.”

“But, father,” said the boy, again, “how *old* everything looks! It seems to me nothing looks nice, as it did in the rooms.”

“The effect of disorder, Johnnie,—of things being out of their proper places and use. But, somehow, it seems to me that Johnnie himself looks a little out of his element. No collar, and hair beseeching for a brush!”

“Yes, father; but I was in such a hurry; and I could n’t look very nice to-day, you know.”

“ Ah, why not? At least why not *begin* by being nice? Here comes your mother. I don’t see that she has found it necessary to leave off her collar, or that her hair is not as smooth as usual.”

“ Oh, but mother always looks nice! And her hair has got used to keeping smooth. I don’t believe anything ever does rumple it.”

“ Give yours a little of the same discipline, then, since you see what education can do.”

Johnnie disappeared among the packages, and up the stairs.

Mrs. Osburn joined her husband, for a moment, at the door.

“ Shall you go down to the counting-room this morning?” she asked.

“ Oh, yes; I must be there for an hour or two, at least,” he replied.

“ Then, will you remember to call in at Blake’s on your way, and tell them to send up that little wardrobe immediately? It ought to go with the next load.”

“ They promised to send it early; but I

will look in, and remind them of it. How soon do you think you will be ready to go, yourselves?”

“Not until afternoon. I made arrangements there, as far as possible, yesterday; and it will be important now for me to remain here until the house is cleared.”

A couple of hours later John was standing on the sidewalk, in the midst of a little curious knot of neighbor-children, who, with books in hand, were on their way to school, but had stopped to listen eagerly to his glowing description and anticipation of his new country home, thinking what a very lucky boy John Osburn was, to be out of school, and exempt from duty, and moving out of town, too!

“I suppose you won’t go to any new school till after vacation?” said Charlie Robins.

“I don’t know. I guess not. Hallo! here comes another wagon! Furniture in it, too. I wonder if folks are coming to move in, before we get out!”

A cart drew up behind the one that stood to be loaded, before the door.

“Mr. Osburn’s?” inquired the driver.

“Yes, sir,” answered Johnnie.

The man unfastened the tail-board of his wagon.

“Lend a hand here, somebody, will you? Where’s this to go?”

John sprang up to the steps, and found his mother at the foot of the stairs.

“Mother! there’s some furniture come! What is it? The man’s in a hurry.”

Just then two men came out from the front-parlor, each carrying two piano-legs, which they set down in the corner of the vestibule.

“Stand back, John; or run out! They are coming with the piano now. What did you say? Some furniture come? Oh! that’s the little wardrobe for your room. Tell the man to wait a moment, and they will put it in after the piano.”

Well, Johnnie had got about enough, now, I think, to crown the day’s delight! A little

wardrobe for his own room ! Charlie Robbins had really nothing more to say. They could only walk round and round the wagon, looking at it on every side, and seeing very little indeed, for it was wound about with coarse cloth. But there was no doubt in either of their minds that when it should be unpacked it would prove to be a very perfect and wonderful wardrobe indeed.

“And oh, mother !” cried Johnnie, as soon as he found a chance to speak to her, “I shall keep my things so nice in it, you know !”

“No, Johnnie, I don’t know yet,” replied Mrs. Osburn.

John’s strength of mind was to be tried still further, before the end of the day, with joyful surprise.

As the family alighted from the 4 : 20 train, on time at 5 : 05 at Chequasset, they were met by Mr. Osburn, who had gone down by a previous train, and led by him to a pretty, dark-green carryall, drawn by a long-tailed black horse, and therein comfortably placed, before they had so much as found time to ask questions.

John jumped up, last, to the front seat, with his father.

“Oh, father, what a nice carryall! And what a splendid horse! Where did they come from? They’re a great *deal* better than you used to get at Brown’s. May n’t I drive?”

“Yes, drive away. Get acquainted with Blackbird as fast as you can, for I shall expect you to be head-coachman for us one of these days.”

“But perhaps we sha’n’t always have the same horse. Is his name Blackbird? Who told you?”

“Is it a good name?”

“First-rate!”

“Weil, I thought so. And since you have n’t any objection, we may as well settle it between us. And I hope we shall have the same horse a great many years. I expect to, or I should n’t have bought him.”

John could n’t jump up, or clap his hands, or throw up his cap, for he was busy with the reins. But a great flash of delight

jumped from his heart to his eyes, and from them up to his father's face; and after a breath or two, he just said, in an indescribable sort of emphatic tone, —

“Well, that *is* good!”

And so Blackbird was voted into the family at once, name and all; and so, too, after a little drive of five minutes, they were all safely set down at the door of a plain, pleasant, old-fashioned looking house, with a great front-yard, and a long piazza; and John never thought of his room, or his new wardrobe, or the hundred things he had been in such a hurry to look after inside, till he had walked round and round the horse, and patted him on the nose, and called him by his name a dozen times, and at last, by his father's desire, had once more jumped upon the seat, and driven him down the avenue, in triumph, to his stable.

CHAPTER II.

STEPHEN.

JOHN woke next morning early. The only wonder, and, as he thought, no small virtue, was that he went to sleep at all.

The first sound he heard was the singing of birds, seemingly close to his window.

Then he just shut his eyes again, for a minute, and let the delicious sense of all his pleasures creep softly through his brain.

Is there anything more delightful than the first waking in the morning in a new and pleasant place, where one hopes to be very happy? The charm of freshness and strangeness, that is to make, for a day or two at least, each step an exploration and discovery, — the vague, bright plans for doing a hundred things, where there is, as yet, no routine, nothing decided or begun, only a fresh and

beautiful beginning to be made! It seems to me God gives us these new turns, these fresh starts in life, with a purpose, for our bettering; and to suggest to us afar off, perhaps, the wonderful joy our souls shall feel, when they wake, by and by, to the new life of heaven.

Well, John opened his eyes again, and saw, first of all, — standing awkwardly, and very much in the way, just where the men had hastily set it inside his door last night, — the new, beautiful black-walnut wardrobe. There was no closet in his room, and therefore his mother had bought this.

“Is n’t that jolly now?” he exclaimed, and forthwith launched himself out of bed, to examine afresh the shelves and drawers, and try how easily he could reach the hooks and manage the lock.

“If I only had my trunk in here, now!”

But, for want of the things that were really to be placed there, he had hung within it, cap, coat, jacket, and trousers that he took off on going to bed, in such order and space

as they were rarely used to ; and had put his shoes and stockings in a drawer, and set his tool-box — a chief treasure that he had kept in his own especial knowledge through the packing and removal — on the floor.

This was suggestive.

What if he were to drive in a few extra nails, lower down, for small things?

On consideration, however, he wisely came to the conclusion that it might not exactly do. Former experience had taught him that such improvements were not always hailed with approbation by maturer minds ; and he therefore proceeded, as the next best amusement he could devise, to take down his garments and put himself into them ; hanging his night-gown in their stead, in solitary state.

Ten minutes more and he was rushing down the front staircase, to the piazza door, just to take a look down the lane, where the bobolinks were singing (it was now late in May, and they always arrive punctually upon the eleventh, don't they?) and then

hasten to the stable to see Blackbird at his breakfast.

The house stood back a little from the high-road, and was shaded on each side with great elm and ash trees; but in front, across the road, and into the lane that ran straight down from just opposite the gate, was the prettiest green glimpse in the world.

Elms and locusts, of wild and natural growth, covered it in with walls and roof; and all summer long the birds and butterflies made it their arcade of fashion. Aristocratic birds' nests they were, that cuddled in its nooks, — built long ago by the oldest families, and rebuilt, or replaced, in the self-same spot, for nobody knows how many years, by generation after generation.

And the old house, too, that looked down the lane, had stood there long enough to be quite in keeping with the rest; and many little feet had tottled and scampered over its floors, till they came to sound with a manly tramp in the old home, and at last turned themselves away from it, and went out into the wide world.

Johnnie Osburn knew little of all this, beyond that it was a quaint, roomy old place, that, as he said, "looked as if lots of people had lived in it, and always had a good time there;" and that his father had been fortunate enough to buy it for such moderate sum as he could afford to pay; and that now, after two or three years' "talk" about going somewhere out of town to live, here they actually were, and he had got all the indispensable exploring and reconnoitring to do, as fast as possible.

Behind the house, the ground sloped pleasantly southward a little way, and here was the garden.

Beyond it, in the hollow, with promise of endless delight, a little chattering brook went by, from the hills to the river; and up from its opposite margin rose a green, wooded knoll, which would have been a hill, and have had a name of its own, if it had not been for the bigger ones a little way off, that took to themselves all the glory of the neighborhood, and so left it simply to be known as the High Pasture.

But while I have been telling you thus much of the immediate surroundings of John's new home, he was himself taking a much more rapid survey of it all, and, catching a glimpse of his father in the barn-yard, has darted away to join him, and look after Blackbird.

It was very pleasant, down there in the barn-yard, this bright May morning.

The barn itself was a curious building, nearly as big as a church, and consisting of two parts, built at different times, and by people who seemed to have had very different purposes in its construction.

The old part was a long, large, open hay-barn, with scaffolding above, and threshing-floor below, having a line of stanchions for cattle the whole length of its easterly side, and opening to the field with great doors at the south end, — a real farmer's barn. The other, and newer, was a small addition for stable use, across the northerly end, causing the entire building to assume the form of a T. The whole was neatly boarded and shin-

gled, apparently at some recent time, and painted, like the house, of an agreeable shade of tawny or buff brown.

John's father was talking with a man who had a carpenter's rule in his hand. They were planning a partition which should enclose a portion of the large barn, nearest the stable and behind the stanchions, for a tool-room.

Another man, close by, was currying down Blackbird, who stood in the angle of the building, fastened by his halter to a ring in the side of the barn.

Overhead was a great twittering and bustle; for the barn-swallows, whose nests were crowded close all along under the eaves, were skimming incessantly back and forth, for morning exercise and enjoyment, and to pick up their aerial breakfast as they flew.

John thought there never was a spot or scene or combination of circumstances more perfectly enchanting; or, at least, if his thought did n't put itself precisely into these words, it would have done so, if his sensa-

tions could possibly have been brought within such simple form of translation.

Standing there, quite quietly, between the interest of hearing his father's talk with the carpenter, on the one hand, and that of watching, on the other, the progress of Blackbird's toilet, and with that living wonder and delight about him in the air, — for a body drawn by several opposing forces or attractions remains at rest, — John presently perceived, coming in at a little gate below the barn that opened on a footpath to the house, a boy of about his own age. A new force introduced, and the body moves. Boy is more attractive to boy than bird, or horse, or man. John started off, on a line whose instinctive direction brought him into the footpath at the precise point to meet the stranger lad, who carried in one hand a nice, white, covered basket, and in the other, a little china pitcher.

When John came up, he spoke, —

“ My mother sent me over with her compliments, and she thought, as you had just

moved in, your mother might like a few warm biscuits, and a little cream, for breakfast. And she says, if there is anything she can do to help her in any way, she shall be very happy."

"I'll go up to the house with you, and find mother," replied John. "Where do you live?"

"Oh, just over in the next house, down the road. My father's name is Mr. Sellinger. He's the minister. My name's Stephen."

"And my father's name is Mr. Osburn, and my name's John," was the reply; and so they both walked up to the side-porch together.

John opened the door, and met his mother in the passage which led from the kitchen to the dining-room. She had a plate of buttered toast in her hand; and the table was nicely set in the dining-room, as he saw through the open door.

"Ah, Johnnie!" she said, "where is papa? I was just wondering how I should manage to get you both invited in to breakfast."

"I'll call him in a minute. But here's

some *breakfast* to be invited in, mother. Mrs. Sellinger has sent you over some cream, and some nice hot biscuits.”

Stephen came forward, and repeated his mother's message.

Mrs. Osburn smiled, and a faint, soft color, as of a surprised pleasure, came up in her face. She had lived for many years in the city, where people come and go without taking a bit of notice of each other; and this warm-hearted country neighborliness was something she had quite forgotten to expect, though her early girlhood knew it very well. Johnnie, too, could n't but be reminded of the boy and girl who lived in the opposite house to theirs in Pinckney Street, and whom he had watched so long a time, day after day, at the doors and windows, without knowing their names; and now, here was Stephen Sellinger, who lived as far off as half the length of Pinckney Street, at least, yet with whom he already began to feel well acquainted, and whose mother's biscuits they were to eat for breakfast!

Mrs. Osburn sent back a quiet message of thanks; and John accompanied Stephen as far as the barn, whence he summoned his father to breakfast; and when they came in together, he cried out to his mother, with a burst of repressed enthusiasm, as he saw the plate of delicious-looking rolls upon the table, —

“I say, mother! why did n’t you thank her more? Why, she’s the very jolliest woman that ever I heard of!”

CHAPTER III.

ARRANGEMENTS AND DISARRANGEMENTS.

STEPHEN SELLINGER came over again after breakfast. In a very short space of time he and John found out a wonderful deal about each other, as boys do.

Stephen had not always lived in Chequasset. He could just remember, when he was a very little boy, their moving from the city of New York hither; he believed because either his father or his mother — he could not exactly tell which — had not been in very good health. They were both well enough now, he knew that; and Chequasset was a first-rate place to live in; lots of fun to be had in the summer; though he had had great times in New York, too, once or twice, when he had been there in the winter to see his cousins. His uncle was a Profes-

;

sor of Natural History, and had got a museum, and no end of pictures and things. And Howard Sellinger was to come up here by-and-by, in his vacation, and then he rather guessed they 'd have enough going on.

“Is Howard a big boy?”

“Yes; about fourteen. He always goes into the country somewhere in the summer; and he is always hunting about for all sorts of curiosities, and making collections. Did you ever make a collection of anything?”

“Only a collection of postage-stamps last winter. I got a hundred and fifty. But I kept them in a box, and somehow they got upset once or twice in my bureau drawer, and mixed up with my clothes and things; and so a good many got lost. And then I began to paste the rest into a book, but I could n't do it very well. I got them on crooked, or put them in the wrong places, and then they tore when I tried to take them off again. So I gave it all up at last, and I don't know where the old book went to. 'T was n't much fun.”

“Oh, you ought to see Howard’s! He brought it up here last June. It’s a splendid book,—all bound. And he’s got the different flags of all the countries pasted in at the heads of the pages, and the stamps under them, just as they belong. He always has everything just so.”

“Oh, I say, Stephen!” interrupted John, “come with me, will you, up into my room? I’ve got the greatest wardrobe to keep my things in, instead of a closet! And I guess my trunk’s in there by this time. I must go and fix it up.”

The trunk was there, and the wardrobe had been set back in an appropriate place, in the middle of one of the long sides of the chamber. The room was a peculiar one, and by-and-by I will describe it particularly; but just now I must attend to Johnnie and his trunk, and afterwards I shall have all the other events of this, his first day at Chequasset, to recount within the limits of this chapter.

John produced the key of his trunk from

his pocket, unlocked it, and threw back the lid. At first view it presented rather a mixed up and discouraging aspect, as certain books, balls, tops, a small boat, a mass of entangled string, some soiled collars, a pair of india-rubber boots even, not quite glossy clean, and other articles collected in odd corners at the last, had been hastily thrust in above the piles of clothing.

John threw them out, right and left.

“Where are you going to put these?” asked Stephen.

“Oh, I don’t know. I’ll find a place for them somewhere, by-and-by. I want to get my wardrobe fixed first.”

So he took out shirts, stockings, night-gowns, and so forth, and deposited each different sort of article in a separate drawer; with much neatness of effect, to be sure, but with the very poorest possible economy of room. There is always something very fascinating in the aspect of unused space, which is to be disposed of at will. Empty shelves and hooks and drawers offer such a tempt-

ing look of accommodation for anything whatever. They are like unspent money, which may buy any of a thousand things until it is once broken in upon.

By the time John had hung up his jackets and trousers, it occurred to him that he had somehow spoiled the charm; that there was no longer a vacant place where he might have the pleasure of making a new bestowal; and he saw that he might easily have been much more compact in his arrangements.

“I’ll tell you what, Stephen!” he exclaimed. “I’ll empty all these things out again, and pack ’em closer.”

So out they came again in haste, and were thrown upon the bed. But, alas! in the double transition they had now become unsettled from their smooth and orderly folds, and here and there the sleeve of a night-gown or a shirt escaped and hung awkwardly from the pile, which Johnnie’s attempts at replacement only discomposed the more, and got altogether into a worse jumble than ever; so that I don’t know whether or

how long he might have persevered in trying to reduce matters to order, if his mother had not called to him from an adjoining chamber, and asked him to walk into the village, to buy for her a paper of leather-headed tacks, which she needed to make use of as soon as possible.

“There now,” said he to Stephen, half in vexation and half with a feeling of secret relief, “I shall have to leave all these things here till I get back. Come along!”

The walk to the village was about half a mile. At half the distance the road sank down into a charming hollow, where the little brook that came round behind Mr. Osburn’s garden ran across, under a shade of alders and willows. It spread out here, occupying quite a wide space. The road passed over a little bridge on the right-hand side, and below this, at the left, was the stream. A track of wheels ran through it, made by persons who drove their horses through the water, to cool their feet and take a drink.

John stopped and looked over.

“What a jolly place to sail my boat!” he exclaimed.

“Yes,” said Stephen, “if you don’t let it get sucked away under the wall by the current.”

“Oh, I’d look out for that,” John replied.

“When I get back I mean to bring it right down here. Let’s make haste.”

So they walked on to the village, where John made his purchase of tacks for his mother, and then hurried homeward with them as fast as possible. The church-clock struck ten as they crossed the brook again.

“Don’t your school keep?” asked John.

“Not Saturdays,” replied Stephen. “It keeps till two o’clock all the other days, Wednesday and all, and then we have all day Saturday.”

“Bully!” exclaimed John.

It looks queer in a book, I know, where boys, unless the very bad ones,—the little villains of juvenile romance who are regularly set up as warnings,—are expected to be

upon company behavior, and talk with exemplary propriety, but I can't help it; that's just what he said, and if I am to tell you about boys and their ways, I must tell them as I know them. I do not see any other honest way to do.

Mrs. Osburn was quite pleased with the expedition with which John had done her errand for her, and being very busy, and not having looked into his room since the morning, when she ordered the arrangement of his furniture, she was not aware of the confusion he had created there, and thought of no objection when he said he wanted to go down to the brook a little while with his boat.

"Is it quite safe, Stephen?" was all she asked.

"Oh, yes, ma'am; it's a very nice place,—down where the road crosses."

"Very well, Johnnie. Only don't get wet; and come back in good season. We shall dine early now; at one o'clock."

John and Stephen were occupied for some

time before setting off, in putting in masts, and cutting some sails for the boat, of stiff white paper. They also disentangled a long piece of string from the bunch of twine in John's trunk, and fastened it to the bow for a safety-line, or “cable,” as they called it. Then they went off, leaving behind them the additional litter, in the already disordered room, of scraps of paper and chip-pings of wood. By this time, you see, they had succeeded in getting up what the house-maid would have called a “very pretty mess indeed.”

I think you will have discovered, from what I have already told you, that John's character was lacking just where most boys, and many men, do lack: in love of order, and power of concentration,—that is, in the ability to keep the attention and interest fixed upon one thing steadily until it is accomplished.

He was in rather peculiar circumstances now, to be sure. The novelty and attraction of everything around him,—a new home,

a new acquaintance, new possessions, freedom from his ordinary duties, — all combined to unsettle him, and divide his mind among multiplied objects of thought and action. Usually, an acquisition like that of his new wardrobe, would have been a matter of paramount interest for the time; and he would have succeeded in getting it, certainly once, into perfect and beautiful order; and would have set out with the expectation, at least, of always keeping it so. But it must be confessed that, even in the most favorable conditions, this would very likely have been all, and that John's mother was quite justified for the little doubt implied in her answer to his gleeful assurance that "now he should keep his things so nice!"

Very well, you may say, is there any great harm in it, after all? He seems to be a pretty good sort of boy. What if he does leave things heedlessly about, now and then, and jump from one unfinished undertaking into another? Ah, you haven't found out, yet how closely, in character as well as

in all the world outside of us, one thing is linked with, and dependent upon another; and how “a little leaven leavens the whole lump!”

We shall see how it worked in Johnnie’s case; and whether he could always be a pleasant and happy and dutiful boy, with this one fault in the way.

The two boys were quite successful and happy in sailing their boat. The brook, although it spread out wide and shallow over the road, gathered and narrowed itself in again to a deeper channel as it passed under the wall into the meadow; and so, by standing close to the bridge, John could launch the little craft and allow it to be carried down with the current, while Stephen, by climbing along the wall to a comfortable seat among the stones, was ready to stop it with a long stick when it reached the critical point where the water, with a gurgle and rush, plunged under for its race onward toward the river. Then John, who had meanwhile kept one end of his cable in his

hand, could draw the boat back, and start her on a fresh voyage.

They continued this amusement for some time in the same way, and then changed places, — Stephen managing the cable on shore, and John going out on the rocks with the stick.

By-and-by, during a pause in which Stephen was righting one of the masts which had tipped a little out of place, John, taking a look down along the watercourse through the meadows, discovered some bright blue flowers growing near its margin.

“ Oh, Stephen,” he cried, “ let’s go down and get some of those blue flowers for my mother ! What are they ? ”

“ They’re flag-lilies, I suppose. Wait a minute. I can’t fix this mast ; and the sails are all wet through, and coming to pieces. I’ll moor the vessel and come down. But we’ll have to be careful, or we shall slip off the stones into the water.”

Stephen moored the boat by rolling up a portion of the cable over his hand, and then

putting it upon the ground with a heavy stone upon it, allowing the boat to drift out a little way, and rest upon the water.

There was one contingency, however, which it did not occur to him to provide for.

He joined John, and they decided it would be best to take off their shoes and stockings, and roll up their trousers, and so go down over the stones that lay in the margin of the water, rather than risk the soft ground of the bank, or incur the danger of their shoes slipping on the wet stones.

So they reached the flags in safety; and gathered a handful each of the blue lilies, and were just considering whether or not to explore the course of the brook farther, when a rumbling noise along the road and the splash of a horse's feet in the water startled them both.

At the same moment a man, mounted upon a heavy wagon, who had just driven his horse into the brook upon the roadside, was rather astonished at seeing before him

on the water a little boat, moored, and apparently deserted by its owner. But a glance around showed him upon the wall the shoes and stockings, and farther on, the just visible heads of the two boys among the flags. Fortunately for them, he was a good-natured man, who had boys of his own at home.

“Hollo!” he cried. “Skipper ahoy! Boat loose, and a whale coming!”

John and Stephen began to scramble back over the stones at a rate of speed that threatened a wetting.

“Take it easy!” cried out the man in the wagon. “Whale’s inclined to be quiet, and boat’s safe enough, if he don’t happen to drink it up.”

As they reached the road, shoes and stockings in hand, and hastened round to secure the boat, the village-clock struck one.

“Dinner-time!” cried Stephen. “We’d better make haste home!”

“Jump up, if you’re going my way,” said the man in the wagon, “and I’ll take you along.”

Nevertheless, John was late at dinner.

He was somewhat surprised, on coming into the house, at its improved and orderly aspect. A great deal had been done in this long, busy morning; and already, to his inexperienced eyes, it looked as if really nothing remained to do, now, but to go on and live.

“Why, mother!” he exclaimed, as he crashed into the dining-room, boy-fashion, with his lilies in one hand and his dismayed boat in the other, — “you’ve got all fixed and finished, have n’t you? Here’s a lot of blue lilies I got for you down at the brook.”

And depositing lilies and boat upon the side-board, he was sliding into his seat at the table, with a very hungry, eager look, and utterly oblivious of his toilet.

“Johnnie! Johnnie!” expostulated Mrs. Osburn, “you know you can’t possibly come to the table *so!*”

“Why, yes, I can, mother! Don’t you see?” he asked, with a funny, insinuating look, as he seated himself. “It’s a real *easy* way.”

“I’m sorry if you find it so. At any rate, it is quite impossible for us to have you here. Go, Johnnie,” she added, with decision, after a pause.

I am sorry to have to record the first symptom of ill-humor in Johnnie; but I must confess that the funny look upon his face, feeling itself useless, changed to an equally useless, and far less becoming expression; and that he didn’t shut the door after him *quite* as gently as it might have been done, or proceed upstairs with the quietest possible footstep; and even, that his mother, if her ears had been as fine as ours, might have caught a muttered something as he retreated, which sounded like —

“Catch me bringing you any more lilies!”

But mothers’ ears have a peculiar anatomical construction of their own, I suppose. It must be a sort of little valve that opens and shuts at will, for I have known them look as placid and unconscious as possible, sometimes, when, if they had heard all that

I did, I think they must have worn a very different expression ; and then, again, at night, perhaps, when all the house beside was sound asleep, I have known the first little moaning, “ Mother ! ” from a restless and wakeful child, call the mother in an instant to her feet and to the bedside. It must be she is most especially careful to set the little valve wide open when she kisses her children the last “ Good-night,” and lays her head on her own pillow.

In the afternoon John had a new and wonderful achievement to carry out. Nothing less than an inquisitorial visit to the swallows’ nests under the eaves of the barn. This idea had come into his head early in the morning, during the few moments that he had stood watching the curious little settlements of mud-houses, built so cosily all along in a block, and pouring out of every aperture their busy inhabitants. A long ladder lay upon the ground beside the building, and with a mental “ putting of this and that together,” the

suggestion was not slow in coming to the brain of a boy of ten.

So, with the help of Jacob, his father's man, he raised the ladder, and climbed carefully to the top, Jacob standing beneath and holding it firmly for him.

When he got there, he didn't see exactly what he expected, but he saw in the end something better and more. The openings into the nests were small and round, and the nests deep, built against each other in clusters. Their interior arrangements, therefore, still remained rather a mystery, after all. He could only discover that every little housekeeper evidently had a feather bed of her own, laid carefully above a straw one: and from one and another protruded anxiously little restless black heads, — one or two, — or sometimes, where the family had been longer established, four or five, in a huddle together.

John stood very quietly, partly for his own safety, and partly that he might not frighten the birds, and presently, — whir! close past

his head a little pair of wings went suddenly, and a bird, with a beak full of mud, alighted at about a yard's distance upon an unfinished nest. She laid the morsel of mud upon its wall as a mason might do with a trowel ; and then, poising herself on her little fluttering wings, she beat it down with rapid strokes of her round black head.

John was amazed. He felt the thrill that comes with the first observation or discovery of a new fact that one has chanced upon for himself. Just as if he were the first boy and this the first swallow in the world, he was absorbed, — elated, — with a new knowledge and a near approach to a great mystery.

When the bird flew away again, he came softly down the ladder, without speaking a word till he reached the ground ; and then, eagerly, like any other discoverer, proceeded to publish the matter and claim his glory.

“ Jacob ! ” said he, with wide-open eyes and emphatic utterance, “ I ’ve found out how they do it ! ”

At the back of the new part of the barn building, as I described it to you in the last chapter, were two windows, one on each side, looking out at right angles to the long barn, and high enough up to come nearly on a level with the swallows' nests ; the new front being somewhat higher than the rest. To the one of these which commanded a view of the spot he had just quitted, John quickly betook himself, and thence watched for a longer time than he was aware, and longer than most of my little friends would believe, the progress of the zealous little architect. He saw her come and go in ceaseless flights, to and from her little house, — never stopping to chatter with her neighbors, — and, in fact, each one of them was all the while steadily minding her own business, — building up, little by little, with persevering labor, the brown walls in which she was already on one side shaping the aperture for her door. He did n't see, though, all that I can tell you about it. He did n't know that this was the third time she had patiently gone through

all this toil; that last week, in a gust of rain, her house, that was just completed, had come down about her ears, because of a loose shingle that happened to be left lying upon the roof, and which came clattering down just above her. He was rather puzzled to make out how such a busy, industrious little creature as she seemed to be should have been so behindhand in her work. Well,—we don't all know each other's hindrances, that's very certain.

And so the shadows grew longer, and John sat and watched. I suppose he had hardly ever had in his life a much happier two hours than those. Yet there was one queer thing about it. That, observing and admiring as he was the thrift and activity of a bird, he altogether forgot that there was anything in the world that he himself, at that very time, ought to have been doing.

When five o'clock came, John went down with Jacob, driving Blackbird, to meet his father at the train; and he was very talkative all the way back, giving him an account

of the varied excitements and enterprises of the day ; but he was a little abashed when Mr. Osburn asked him at last, " how he liked his own little room ? " and whether " the new wardrobe was all right ? "

" Oh, yes, it's first-rate," he replied ; " only I have n't had time to get the things fixed yet."

" Not had time, Johnnie ? Are you sure that's it ? You have had as long a day as your mother, haven't you ? And you tell me that she has arranged the whole house already, so that it ' seems like home and not like moving.' I think you might have taken time."

" Well, so I did, father ; or, at least, I began ; but mother called me just when I was in the midst of it, and sent me to the village on an errand, and so I could n't finish, you see."

Was Johnnie quite true and entire in his statement ? Don't you begin to see how faults hang together in links, and one draws another along after it ? Ill-humor, and shuf-

fling excuses — don't these almost always accompany untidy habits?

Not that he really wished to deceive, or could have done so in this. Mr. Osburn, of course, knew quite well how it all was; but Johnnie made a half statement, — a one-sided representation, — nevertheless. He did n't set things quite straight in his mind, any more than in his surroundings. Thoroughness and truth are pretty much the same thing in their essential element; and people who allow themselves to shuffle away anyhow, and smooth over hastily to the eye, in outside matters, had better take heed to this indication of what they will be easily tempted to do in things graver and greater.

John's day, — beginning with a neglect, — ended, as such days are very apt to do, with a disappointment.

“I am going,” said his father, as they drove down the avenue to the house on their arrival home, “to see Farmer Simmons, at the foot of the lane, about a nice little cow I think I

shall buy of him. Perhaps, if you come too, Johnnie, you may have the pleasure of driving her home and seeing Jacob milk her."

"That's agreed!" cried Johnnie, joyfully.

But his mother met them on the piazza, and looked with a very grave face at John.

"I have been to your room, Johnnie," she said, "and I have seen what I really did not expect to see on your first day of possession. Go directly up, and put things in proper order. Jane is too tired to be called on for anything more to-night."

"Oh, mother!" pleaded John, "just wait till I come home with the cow. We sha'n't be long, shall we, father?"

"I'm afraid your chance is lost, John," replied Mr. Osburn. "Things that are not done at the right time are nearly sure to force themselves upon us when we can least bear the trouble of them. Do as your mother wishes, first, and then, if you are ready, come and meet me, afterward."

John squeezed back a tear, for he knew it was no use. Up-stairs he went; but in his

heart he was wrongly and unreasonably angry with his mother. To this last evil of all his morning negligence had brought him.

It was tedious work, picking up the scraps that littered the floor, and gathering up the odds and ends that he had thrown from his trunk. And when this was done, he no longer felt interested in arranging all his belongings to the very best aspect and advantage. His whole mind was intent on getting through his unavoidable task, and being in time for Jacob and the new cow. Wherefore his garments were hastily placed in the nearest drawers; his toys and traps were stowed away in a heap upon the floor beside his toolbox; and so it came to pass that, while the room outwardly was restored to a tolerable appearance of tidiness, the cunning and wearisome elf, Disorder, crept into the new wardrobe, and took possession, and laughed triumphantly at Johnnie out of all its corners.

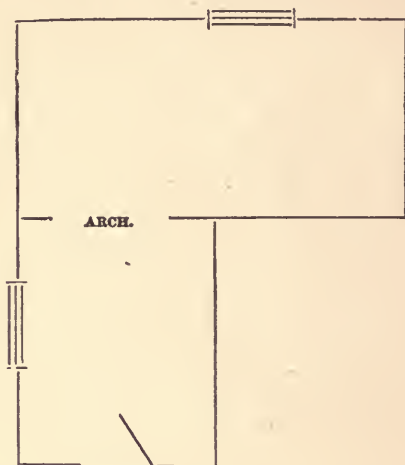
CHAPTER IV.

A NEW PROJECT.

I PROMISED you a description of John's chamber. If you like old houses, and little, quaint, unusual arrangements as well as I do, and as Johnnie did, you will be interested in hearing about it.

The house had a square front, with what is called an L extending from it behind. John's room was in this L. The part which joined the main building was divided at first into two bedrooms, side by side, together occupying its entire width, but not in equal shares. Back of these, at some later time, an addition had been made; and the space so obtained had been used on the one side to make a large closet or small dressing-room, connected with the larger of the two original rooms; and the remainder, by cutting away

the partition which intervened, was thrown into the second, or smaller. This was John's room; and was, as you will thus understand, a sort of double room, having one portion at right angles with the other, thus :



The opening between was finished in the form of an arch, and there was a descent here of a single step, the further portion being lower than the other. I have marked the door and windows, as you see.

At the right as you enter, stood his wardrobe. Opposite the door, and beyond the arch, was his bed. Opposite this, again, in the right-hand end, his dressing-table, and against the blank wall beside the arch, his washing-stand.

Altogether, it was a very pleasant arrangement; and John, as you may suppose, found it charming from its novelty.

You may think it very strange, too, that if John had before had any disorderly ways, this should not have been with him a starting-point of sure improvement. It would have been so natural, you say, that he should have felt a new and zealous interest in having everything about him in perfect keeping and methodical array. It seems hardly to be believed that he should at once have fallen into *carelessness* and confusion. But it is not always the marked outward changes in our life or circumstances that produce such corresponding change as we might look for in character. We have what seems to be great opportunities, and pass through them unim-

proved ; and again, a very trifle shall turn, unexpectedly, the whole course of our habits and motives, henceforth.

If John had had a different room given him in the same house where he had lived for so many years, the taking possession and arranging it, being but a single novelty, would have been absorbing. But here he was surrounded by novelties, drawn hither and thither by various attractions ; and fresh employments for his time offered themselves every hour. He still had a pride and delight in his room ; and he still had an intention of pretty soon taking time to “ fix it all up, first-rate ;” but meanwhile, he was busy in a dozen other ways, and all along growing so used to the ownership and occupancy of the pretty apartment, that before the convenient occasion should come, his first enthusiasm would have worn off, and it would all have become an old story.

I dare say, also, you may wonder a little at my thinking it worth while to tell you a long story only to illustrate the importance

to a boy of ten of acquiring a habit of order and exactness in little things. But a boy of ten, brought up among gentle influences, is not likely, I am glad to think, to have fallen into very serious moral evils. It is precisely these faults which seem trifling, that he is in danger of; and that, according as they may be unchecked or overcome, will have a subtle but certain influence in the formation of his whole character and life. I think we are put into life as into a school; and God, like a wise Teacher, gives us, at first, but simple lessons to learn; so simple, that we may imagine it can be of little consequence whether we learn them thoroughly and faithfully, or not; and yet they are purposely provided to lead us on, easily and insensibly, to far higher and more difficult things. "Faithful in little," at the beginning, — "faithful," afterward "in much." It is only in very untoward conditions, growing out of the wrong or neglect of others, that a child's life-lessons are hard ones at the first. It was not meant to be so.

John used sometimes to say to his mother, when she urged upon him the importance of orderly habits, —

“Why, mother, that’s *girls’* business! Boys want to learn different sorts of things. Aunt Horatia says that Cousin Leonard is nothing but a cot-betty; all the time poking into corners, and fidgeting round like a woman. I don’t want to be a cot-betty!”

“Neither do I wish it, Johnnie,” his mother would answer. “But one may have the instinct and habit of order without being a ‘Betty’ at all; much less need one be *nothing* but a Betty.’ You can never be anything great without order. It is ‘heaven’s first law,’ — the first condition for things of mind and soul, as well as body and belongings. Do you think any one could be a great merchant, or a lawyer, or a doctor, or a commander of armies, or a ruler of a State, without this first of all, and at the bottom of everything? God made the world by it, Johnnie.”

When the new tool-room was finished,

Mr. Osburn told John that he might keep his tool-box there ; and he desired the carpenter to make for him a little bench of a convenient height for him to work at. This stood in one corner of the room ; and there he was to keep his box, and do all his little jobs of carpentry. In fact, he was forbidden, from this time forward, to take any tool or work of the sort, into the house, unless by especial permission. His mother expressed herself greatly delighted at this new arrangement, as John's tools and materials had been, for a long while, literal ' stumbling blocks ' in the way of her orderly housekeeping. Moreover, John was put upon his honor, as a condition of his occupying such portion of his father's room, not to meddle with, or borrow for his own use, any tools of Mr. Osburn's, — not even in what might seem to him the greatest emergency ; for, as his father very truly said, no such necessity could arise except through carelessness of his own ; for he was provided with light implements of every sort that Mr. Osburn himself was possessed of.

Of course, John's first impulse, on finding himself so commodiously established, was to set on foot some grand undertaking in the mechanical way. For a day or two, he could think of nothing sufficiently stupendous; but, at length, one morning, as he accompanied Jacob to drive the cow up into the High Pasture, a bright thought struck him.

“I'll tell you what, Jacob!” he exclaimed, as they crossed the brook at the foot of the garden by means of four or five stepping-stones. “I'll build a bridge! Won't that be jolly?”

“Ruther,” replied Jacob. “Only I cal'late the buildin' 'll be the jolliest part on 't.”

“Why? don't you believe I can build a good one?” asked John.

“Donno but yer might,” replied Jacob; “but I guess you won't like it so well as the steppin'-stones, arter all.”

“Well, the stones *are* nice, to be sure,” replied John; “but I'll build the bridge a little way up, so as to have the stones, too. And then, you know, people can take their

choice. If my mother came over here, she'd like the bridge best, I know."

"Most likely she would," agreed Jacob.

So, as soon as they got back to the barn, John began to collect his tools and plan his work. Mr. Osburn had given him leave, on condition that he should not abuse the privilege by wastefulness, to take material or "stock," as he called it, in carpenter phrase, from what had remained after the real carpenter-work was finished. There was a small pile of nicely-planed boards in the barn, beside the tool-room door. John first selected two of these, and having sawed them into lengths of about three feet each, he piled them upon his wheelbarrow, and wheeled them down to the brook. Then he went to the wood-pile, and found among the long logs which had not been sawed up, as yet, for firewood, two, that would answer, as he thought, for the foundation of his bridge. But, before attempting their removal, he prudently measured their length with his two-foot rule, and proceeded again to the

brook to make a measurement there, from side to side. He thus found out, by carrying his rule along as well as he could from stone to stone, that the distance across was in the neighborhood of ten feet, whereas his logs would only give him six. Here was a puzzle.

On being appealed to for advice, Jacob suggested that the only way would be to cut down a couple of trees in the pasture. But this John could not do without his father's leave, both for the cutting down of the trees, and for Jacob's assistance in accomplishing it. He was very much disturbed and disappointed. His whole day's plan was overthrown. He found it very difficult, as indeed many older people do, to turn aside from what he had already begun with zealous interest, and apply his energy to something else.

Consequently, he loitered about for some time, in a very uncertain and dissatisfied manner ; and beset Jacob with reiterated inquiries “ if he couldn't possibly think of any

other way to do," until Jacob, who was in reality a very good-natured man, and would willingly have given any help in his power, exclaimed at last in self-defence, —

“Land’s sake ! boy ! Dew jest lemme be ! I declare to man, ye pester me so, I can’t scurecly think o’my own work !”

John stared a little, in sudden surprise, both at the unusual impatience, and at the new development in dialect ; for he had not yet become well enough accustomed to Jacob’s New England country fashions of speech, not to be somewhat astonished at each fresh sentence that fell from his lips.

However, he quite well understood that he was not to interfere any further at present with Jacob’s attention to his immediate duty ; and he could easily translate the word “pester,” which he had never heard before, into his own familiar “bother.” So he very wisely turned away, and took his unrest and indecision elsewhere.

Why didn’t he carefully look after his

tools, and restore all to their proper places, ready for to-morrow?

At noon, when Jacob came up to the house to dinner, John ventured once more to open the subject of the bridge.

“Jacob,” said he, “if my father is willing, won’t you go over to the pasture to-night early enough to cut those trees for me before you drive home the cow?”

Jacob, propitiated by the good-humored reception of his morning remonstrance, and perhaps with a latent misgiving that he had been “a leetle might cross-grained,” readily consented, and at five o’clock John met his father at the train, with his eager request hovering upon his lips.

“Well, what is it, boy?” asked Mr. Osburn, as he took his seat in the wagon. “I see you’ve got something to propose.”

“Yes, father. I want, if you please, that you should let me have two trees out of the pasture to build a bridge.”

“Two trees! And to build a bridge!” exclaimed Mr. Osburn. “Well, your ideas *are* expanding rapidly.”

But John explained his ideas in such a way that his father saw he had really matured a plan of operations, and would not only be disappointed, but discouraged, if denied. So he gave his consent that Jacob should cut down a couple of small cedars, such as grew in the edge of the pasture, and help John in placing them across the stream.

John exercised what to him was very great self-control for the next half hour, in not teasing or hurrying Jacob while he unharnessed Blackbird, and gave him his evening feed, and finished "putting to rights" about the stable. But when he took hatchet and saw, and called out, "Naow then! I guess we'll go and see 'baout them air trees!" Johnnie knew what it was to have a great pleasure, long deferred, come at last; and it was with many a spring and flourish and antic, that he led the way down outside the garden fence, to the stepping-stones across the brook, and up the sloping path into the High Pasture.

CHAPTER V.

HINDRANCE.

“NAOW, Mister Johnnie,” said Jacob, deliberating, as he laid his brown, brawny hand against the trunk of a straight, stalwart young cedar, of perhaps six inches diameter; “seems to me this ’ere’s abaout as likely a sample of what you want as there is hercabaouts. What d’ye say?”

John looked up and down the tree with a knowing air, his hands in his pockets, and an expression of great responsibility and authority on his face.

“Yes, Jacob,” he replied at length, “that’ll do. Cut away!”

Up rose the axe, with slow, threatening, deliberately-in-earnest poise, and then, — crash! down came its keen edge into the wood, and the splinters flew out as if in

indignant surprise at this onslaught upon the patient growth of years.

Hack ! Whack ! the blows, with sure aim come down, thicker and louder into the heart of the tree, and faster and faster flew the splinters, until the very centre was cut across, and then Jacob paused, took a look with his head on one side, and passed round to a new position exactly opposite.

“ Step raound here,” said he to Jolnnie.
“ The tree ’ll fall that way.”

“ How do you know ? ” asked John.
“ And why don’t you keep cutting on this side ? ”

“ Oh, ’cause I guess ’t would be kinder pleasanter to be just abaout here, when it goes over,” replied Jacob. “ I ’ve made the biggest cut, yer see ; an’ a rap or tew naow ’ll bring it daown.”

Hack ! Whack ! Crack ! A few blows more, and then the top swayed, — made a great, shivering sweep through the air, — and the princely young cedar-tree lay prone and helpless on the ground.

Twenty-five or thirty years, perhaps, it had stood there, gathering its slow fibres, and knitting itself in might, and now it was hewn down that a little boy might build a bridge across the brook !

“ Wal,” said Jacob, as he paused, and swung his hatchet by the middle of the handle, — “ the thing is naow to git another jest as near like it as yer can, so’st yer bridge ’ll lay even ; an’ that ’s a puzzler, allus. No tew things ever does grow jest alike, they say. I’ve hearn people wonder, and make a great marvel of that air, but I guess, myself, sech folks never happened to try to make tew things alike. They ’d ha’ found aout ef they had, that ’t was a pesky sight easier to make ’em different.”

They walked about from tree to tree, trying the girths with their hands, until they had wandered quite as far into the pasture as was at all desirable, considering that the stick of timber, when cut, was to be carried down to the brookside ; and at length, just as Jacob was “ cal’latin’ ” that “ this ’ere was nigh

ababout same bigness as t'other," the old cow, who had begun to feel a little surprised at not being called for as usual, strayed along homeward down the hill, and came toward them.

"There comes old Buttercup," quoth Jacob, as he lifted the axe against the second cedar; "I guess you'll hev to 'tend her, and see her 'long to the barn, now she's got started, for fear she should smell aout the gardin, and git over the brook in the wrong place. Ef you'll jest git her shot inter the yard all safe, I'll stay here an' finish up this part o' the job, an' you c'n come back an' see ter puttin' daown the stringers, when I git 'em ready."

John picked up a dry branch wherewith to quicken Mooly's footsteps, and took up the line of march in the rear, as she passed along with slow and ponderous movement toward the brook.

It had been a very warm day, and Madam Buttercup, when she felt the cool running water about her legs, was in no apparent haste to proceed; but stood midway in the

stream, whisking her tail at the flies, and lifting up her great horned head in the sunset.

Johnnie, too, stood still a moment, on the biggest stepping-stone, enjoying the pleasurable conjunction and harmony of things about him, and waiting to hear the rushing crash of the cedar as it should fall.

The water was singing and flashing over the pebbles, in the golden glow of the twilight; there was a warm, spicy, pasture-smell in the air, and the old cow, going home with her pailful of milk in her bag, and stopping to take in her brute sense of delight in the summer evening, made it all more palpable with a remote sort of sympathy.

The “whish” of the cedar boughs through the air roused up Johnnie and the cow, however, at the same moment, from their contemplations, and the path over the field to the barn-yard was soon trodden. Buttercup walked docilely in, and John hasped the gate behind her, and in three minutes more had leaped over the stones again, and rejoined

Jacob in the pasture, just as the latter had sawed of his tree at the proper length, and was shouldering the stick to carry it down to the water.

John ran before and pointed out the spot where he intended his bridge should cross, and sprang over to the opposite side to help settle the timber into its place. It rested nicely enough against a hummock of sod at one end, and above a big stone at the other.

“There!” ejaculated Jacob, “I guess that air won’t move agin, onless the world cap-sizes!”

The laying of the second stringer gave them more trouble, both in placing it at the even and accurate distance, and in settling it firmly into its position. But Jacob went back to the nearest fallen tree and cut from it a couple of stakes, which he sharpened at one end with his hatchet, and drove them into the bank, one on each side, to hold the timber securely; and there was thus, to use his own expression when all was done, “abaout as pooty a beginnin’ of a bridge as yer’d want ter see.”

5

“ Cedar Bridge ! ” cried Johnnie, with a bright inspiration. “ That’s the name of it, Jacob ! ”

“ Wal,” replied Jacob, in his quaint way, “ seein’ the job’s over, christenin’ an’ all, I guess we’ll step along hum as fast as we can, — ’caount o’ gittin’ there ! ”

Johnnie’s head was so full of Cedar Bridge that he almost forgot his appetite for supper, though there were delicious preserved strawberries, — housekeeper’s treasure, that might be used more lavishly now that the real kingly fruit would soon be coming, — and Buttercup’s cream, that made one think of her name, and Ruth’s delicious white biscuit, like baked foam, — dainties to which he was ordinarily anything but indifferent.

Early in the morning he was awake, and when Jacob drove the cow to pasture, he gathered up hammer and nails, and accompanied him down to the brook, to make at least a beginning before breakfast.

“ Jacob,” said he, as that personage crossed

the brook again on his return, "ask Ruth, will you, to ring the big bell when breakfast's ready?"

By the time the big bell sounded, he had made what was really a most prosperous beginning. He had nailed four of his boards firmly, side by side, across the logs, and he was able now to calculate how many more he should require for the work. There were seven in all, that he had sawed the day before, and he thought he must get five or six pieces more; besides, as he added to himself, not forgetting to bring the saw with him also to trim off the edges.

His slight supper the night before, and his early morning work, had given him such a real hungry keenness for his breakfast, that he was in nowise inclined this time to shorten the meal, and then he had to drive his father to the station, as Jacob was to be particularly busy this morning in the garden.

He was as bright and happy a boy as you might ever see, during that drive to the village, chatting merrily with his father about

the success of his great undertaking, and the convenience the bridge would prove to be, when it should be finished. His day was auspiciously enough begun; but, — ah, dear me! I am coming to the clouds presently, and I don't half like to go on.

Well, — it was only a very little matter that spoiled everything; just a little bit of carelessness that as yet he wasn't even aware of.

“Jacob!” he called out from the tool-room, about fifteen minutes after he had said his happy good-morning to his father at the train, — “where's my saw?”

“Donno,” was the reply. “Ha'n't seen it.”

“But you *must* have seen it, Jacob! I had it just here yesterday, and I did n't use it anywhere else. What's got it, I wonder! Here's my two-foot rule, and my knife, and all the rest of my things, just where I left them; and my saw's gone! The very thing I can't do without. Bother! I wish folks would let my things alone!”

"I guess nobody ha'n't meddled with it," said Jacob. "Yer must ha' tooken it somewhere else. There's the big saw hangin' up there. Yer might take that, ef yer'd be kerful."

"Oh dear me! I can't take that, you know! I wasn't to touch any of father's tools, no matter what happened. What shall I do? I can't finish my bridge, nor anything. It's too plaguy bad!"

"I'll stop an' saw ye a few boards, ef that's all yer want," said good-natured Jacob, "though I donno's I oughter, fact. Every minute's as good as gold, jest here in June, an' the weeds growin' the hull time's tight's they c'n put in!"

"No, you must n't stop, Jacob," said John, tumbling the boards over, and rattling things impetuously about, as his desperation grew greater. "Father told me, the last thing, not to hinder you a minute."

"Wall, I guess 't'll turn up, somehow," rejoined Jacob, comfortingly, as he departed. "Taint got legs, nor yet wings; an' nothin' 's I know on 'd be likely t' eat it up."

But it did n't turn up. It remained a most perplexing and aggravating mystery; and after wondering and searching ten minutes longer, in vain, and then going back to the brook to nail on the three bits of board that remained, and returning to explore fruitlessly, once more, barn, stable, and tool-room, Johnnie had to give up his cherished plan for the day, altogether; and repaired, heated, and tired, and wholly out of humor, to his mother's room.

Mrs. Osburn was standing at the bedside, cutting out some perplexing work. A quantity of pretty green striped chintz was thrown over the foot-board, and pieces already cut and arranged were piled upon the pillows. A young woman sat in a corner by the window, sewing upon some of the same material. They were making covers for the drawing-room furniture.

John's little sister, Kathie, a child of seven years old, was busy at a table, with quite a new amusement. Her mother had given her a number of empty spools from her work-

basket, and some bits of different colored muslins; and with these she had improvised a crowd of dolls, which she had now assembled as a school, and disposed in classes. The whole surface of the table was occupied by an arrangement of books, set up on their edges, and thus forming an intricate series of recitation rooms, in and out of which she was marshalling her wooden scholars.

John listlessly sauntered up to her, half in search of amusement, and half disposed for mischief.

“What sort of witches are those, Kath!” he asked, in an irritating tone of contempt, and leaning, as he spoke, an elbow against the table in such a manner as to break down a portion of the outer wall of Kathie’s seminary.

“Don’t, John!” exclaimed she, quickly, in annoyance. “They’re my scholars. And you’re spoiling my school-house!”

“Scholars! Phoo! hoo! Before I’d have such a set of blockheads for scholars! And they’re so untidy, too! Why don’t you send

them home to their mothers, to be made fit to be seen?”

And he took up one after another, turned them about, and laughed in a very teasing, provoking manner.

“I wish you’d go away, John!” cried Kathie. “You have n’t any business here in my school-room!”

“Why not? Don’t you let in visitors? Oh, I know why! It’s because you can’t make your scholars mind. How they do behave! I declare, they’re actually jumping out of the windows!”

And with this, by means of one or two dexterous snaps, he sent several of the spools spinning over the academic enclosure, and they rolled away upon the floor.

Kathie’s patience utterly gave way, now, and she gave John a great push, and began to cry aloud. John had a tumble, whether of necessity or not, and made a snatch at the table-cloth as he went down, bringing all the books and spools clattering about his head.

Mrs. Osburn, of course, dropped her chintz and scissors at this culmination of the uproar, the threatening of which had, in a sort of half-aware way, been annoying her for several minutes.

“John!” she exclaimed in a tone of great displeasure, “why do you come into my room to disturb us all? Is it any pleasure to you to destroy Kathie’s amusement, and tease her in this way? Pick up all those things, and then go to your own room, and remain there until dinner-time. I am excessively displeased with you.”

“I couldn’t help it,” rejoined Johnnie. “Kathie pushed me. I was only making a little fun. But of course,” he added, in a muttering undertone, “it’s all my fault! *She’s* never to blame! Touchy little thing!”

Mrs. Osburn drew the little invisible valve over her ears, and turned back to her measuring and cutting; but there was a pained, worried expression on her face, that did not pass away for long after. John had huddled

the books and spools back upon the table, and gone sulkily out of the room.

Was all this well? Were not law and order sadly wanted somewhere beside, in Johnnie's jurisdiction, than only among his outer possessions? Was n't he heedless of a good deal else that was binding upon him, beyond the care of tools and clothes and playthings? And was not something of the same principle lacking in all? He that “keepeth his spirit” can do the smaller thing, — can “rule the city.” And I think that he who learns the smaller thing, as a duty, will learn insensibly, the while, something, at least, of the other, which includes it. The true leaven will spread, until it leaven the whole lump, in howsoever small a corner it may begin. “The kingdom of heaven is as a grain of mustard-seed.”

CHAPTER VI.

MIDNIGHT.

THERE was a "hitch" in Johnnie's temper that didn't get straightened for several days. Things didn't go right with him, and he was very uncomfortable, in many little ways, to other people. The losing of his saw, and the forced suspension of his work quite "threw him off the track," as people say. It was especially disappointing to be thwarted in this, for there was nothing else, just then, that offered itself as a substitute to his attention. Stephen Sellinger was absent from home for a few days, with his father, who had gone away to preach; and John was not only deprived of his companionship as a resource, but was, from the very circumstance of his absence, the more anxious to finish his undertaking successfully.

that he might surprise his friend with it, on his return.

So time passed heavily with him; and wearisomely, I am afraid, for the greater part, with his mother. He did nothing very bad, to be sure;—he was not a bad boy. But he was teasing to Kathie, who could not enter into what he called “fun,” and troublesome to Ruth in the kitchen, and rather a “disturbing force” in the household generally.

It was two or three days after the trouble began, that Jacob called to him one afternoon when he came down to the barn, a little before the usual time for going to the station.

“Look here, John! Why can’t you jest foller up that yaller hen, an’ see whether or no she ha’n’t got a nest somewhere raound here? I’ve ben mistrustin’ on her for a week past, she’s kep’ so aout o’ sight. She’s jest walked aout, naow, from behind that air wood-pile, an’ I guess, ef yer look, yer’ll find sunthin’ there.”

"I guess you *know* there's something there," said John, as he walked toward the wood-pile; for he had by this time become accustomed to Jacob's peculiar fashion of imparting information. "What is it? Chickens?"

"Ef 'tis, it's ruther a new sort, I cal'late. 'T's got teeth, anyhow," said Jacob, with a grin. "'T won't bite. Yer need n't be scairt," added he, as John halted in a little hesitation at his first words.

Wondering what sort of a thing or animal Jacob had discovered, John proceeded cautiously around the end of the wood-pile, and, taking off his straw hat, laid his head close to the fence to look behind it.

What should he see there but his missing saw! To be sure! Didn't he remember, now, having it in his hand when he came, the other day, to the wood-pile, to measure logs for his bridge?

Well, there it lay, just as all lost and hidden things do lie, secret and mute, waiting for the chance of being found, by people who

may pass them by unconsciously a dozen times a day, — wanting them sorely, perhaps, all the while. And there it might have lain, as many lost things do lie, and rusted out, and become worthless, if Jacob had not “mistrusted the yaller hen,” and taken a peep behind the logs.

“Hi — oh! Jacob!” shouted Johnnie, in his great delight, resorting to slang phrase to express it, — “Bully for you and the yellow hen! Come and get it out for me, will you? My arm’s too short.”

Jacob came, — reached in his long arm, and drew out the tool, so lamented and longed for day after day.

“Guess yer would n’t do for an Injun,” he said, as he gave it back into John’s possession.

“Why not?” asked John, surprised.

“Cause yer can’t foller yer own trail,” answered Jacob.

John did not stop for further explanation, though the joke was scarcely palpable to him, even now; but hastened into the tool-

room to "get out stock" for the finishing of his bridge, leaving Jacob to proceed to the village alone.

He had soon sawed up another board into lengths, and wheeled them off to the brook. Now he was busy and happy again. The time fled away swiftly, as he hammered and whistled, and by-and-by, quite tired, he paused and stood up to take a look at the nearly completed structure before he went back for just a couple of lengths more to finish it well into the slope of the bank at each end. This was an after-thought. It had not occurred to him when he first began to nail his boards.

"I guess I'll trim off the edges first," he said to himself, and down again he went to the work.

Another half-hour passed by as he was thus employed, and to his great surprise the tea-bell sounded, as he ran up the path toward the barn-yard again.

John was disappointed at being called away from his work; and yet, he reflected, it could

not have been at a more suitable juncture, as he was obliged to go back at any rate to the barn, and there would still be an hour or more of good daylight wherein he might easily finish the bridge, after tea should be over. So he turned toward the house, and ran in the back way, and up-stairs to his own room, to brush his hair and wash his hands; for he well knew there would be no time gained by hastening to the table without proper preparation, and being sent away to make it.

“Where now, Johnnie?” asked his father, rising from the table and taking his newspaper to go into the parlor for his evening reading, while John at the same moment seized his straw hat, and was departing by another door.

“Down to the brook to finish my bridge. It’s almost done, father, and it’s a real beauty!”

“Well,” replied his father. “But don’t stay there late. It becomes very damp along the brook after dark.”

“No, sir.” And Johnnie was gone.

Picking up his saw in the porch, where he had left it, and flourishing it gayly over his head, — all the better fortified for his work by a good supper, — he ran down the foot-path to the barn, just in time to encounter Jacob at the little corner door, locking up for the night.

“Hallo! Jacob!” he cried, “leave that door open a little while, will you? I’ve got some boards to saw.”

Jacob thrust up his hat with one hand, scratched his head and hesitated.

“Donno,” said he, at length, “haow that air’ll work ezackly. Yer father, yer see, ’s so all-fired partickler ’boaut hevin’ the barn shot up nights, an’ I don’t s’pose I oughter trust you with the key. I’ve got to go right away myself, so’s ter send up Briggs ter see yer father baout a little fencin’ job up in the pastur’.”

“Oh, I’ll lock it up all safe,” replied John. “See if I don’t.”

“Secin’ won’t dew much good, if yer don’t dew it,” replied Jacob, sagaciously.

“But I *will*, honest and true,” rejoined Johnnie. “I sha’n’t stay here but a few minutes. Come, let’s have it; that’s a good fellow. I’m in a hurry.”

“Yer sure yer’ll dew it?” reiterated Jacob.

“Of course I will. Don’t I tell you so?”

“An’ hang up the key behind the kitchen-door?”

“Yes, yes,” said Johnnie, snatching it from Jacob’s hand, as he half held it out toward him. “There, go along; Briggs’ll be off somewhere, and you won’t catch him.”

“I’m more’n half afeared I’ll stan’ a chance o’ ketchin’ sunthin’ else by termorrer mornin’,” said Jacob to himself, as he moved reluctantly away.

John sawed off his two bits of board, and set off to the brook with them; first locking the barn-door and putting the key in his pocket. He would have to return to the tool-room after his work should be finished, and replace his tools, before finally locking up and carrying away the key to its usual place behind the kitchen-door.

His work at the bridge occupied him rather longer than he had anticipated. It was not quite so easy as he had imagined, to fit his boards perfectly against the somewhat irregular surface of sods. He was obliged to fetch a spade and a hatchet, and to cut a little here into the bank, and there to trim away the edges of his finishing bits; but at last, in this way, and with patience, — the workman's chief implement, after all, let him labor in whatsoever fashion he may, — he managed to wedge them in quite firmly and neatly. The ends of rough timber were wholly covered and hidden. One stepped directly from the green descent of sward to the smooth flooring of the bridge.

Nobody who has not brought to a successful completion a toilsome and difficult, yet interesting and exciting, piece of work, can imagine with what a restful joy John sprang to his feet when the last nail was driven to the head, and throwing his hammer upon the bank, trod back and forth from end to end over his bridge. The mere con-

temptation of what he had done, was so very pleasant that he could scarcely make up his mind to gather up his tooools and leave it. But the twilight was deepening, and down here in the hollow it was almost dark; so at last he turned his back reluctantly upon it, and made his way as well as he could, laden with all his accumulated implements, up the hill, and to the barn.

After safely depositing his tools and locking the door, he was leisurely strolling along the path toward the house, twirling the big key round and round upon his finger, when he heard his name called out, in a well-known voice, from over the wall.

“Hallo, Steenie! Is that you?” he responded quickly, turning round upon his heels toward the sound; and at the same moment, by the suddenness of his motion, the key flew from his finger, and fell upon the grass.

“Hold on a minute,” he called out again, “till I pick up this! Never mind, though,” he added to himself; “I’ll just speak to Steenie, and then come back and find it.”

He was so heedless as not to consider how soon it would become too dark for him to discover it; and, strange as it may seem, in the end he quite forgot to come back and look for it at all!

For Steenie had his famous New York cousin with him, — Howard Sellinger, who had arrived that very day, before he and his father reached home; and there was such a deal to be talked of on both sides; John's bridge to be told of, and wondered at, — they couldn't stop to go and see it to-night, but they would come over the first thing in the morning, — and then Stephen and Howard had been round through the lane and out over the field towards the woods, in the exciting chase of a night-hawk, which Howard was very anxious to trace home, to obtain an egg for his collection.

"I saw him drop down," said he, "just in the edge of the trees, not far from a big oak that had a withered branch. I'll go there to-morrow, and hunt the whole place over. If the oak is hollow, I should n't wonder if the

eggs were there. They do sometimes lay in such places; but generally right on the ground. They never make nests, at all."

John was interested, at once; and struck very forcibly, too, with Howard's wonderful knowledge of the doings of birds.

"I never heard of collecting eggs, before," said he. "Can you get many different kinds?"

"Oh, yes," replied Howard. "I have between twenty and thirty, already, and I only began to collect this spring, when I went up to Rhinebeck with my father, for a week."

"But I always thought it was such a horrid thing to rob the nests!" said Johnnie, rather suddenly bethinking himself.

"Not when you do it scientifically," replied Howard, laughing. "The beauty of it is, the birds can't count; and as I only take one for a specimen, it doesn't hurt their feelings at all."

"I wonder if my father would let me make a collection," said John.

“My father’s going to let me,” said Stephen. “He did n’t exactly like it at first, for that very reason, of robbing the nests; but I’ve promised him that I’ll never take but one; and that Howard and I won’t take them from the same nest; and so he has given me leave to begin. He says I shall learn a good deal of Natural History by it, and he supposes people can’t find out such things without taking some liberties.”

“I mean to ask my father right off,” said Johnnie. “I can get some swallows’ eggs to-morrow. But I suppose they are not good for much, they’re so common.”

“Oh, yes!” said Howard. “Begin with whatever you can get. You must have all kinds in a collection. I’ve got six kinds of swallows’ eggs. If I could only get some chimney-swifts, I should have them all. But they’re very hard to get at.”

“Are there seven different kinds of swallows?” asked John, in amazement.

“Seven kinds of day-swallows,” replied Howard. “The night-hawks are a kind of

swallow, too. They all belong to the same family.”

“How did you ever find it all out?”

“Oh, I’ve got some books of Ornithology. I’ll lend you one if you want it. But we must go home now, Steenie. I promised your father I wouldn’t keep you out late, you know.”

Johnnie was fully possessed with his new idea, and with the most enthusiastic admiration of Howard Sellinger. He hurried up to the house to make his immediate request of his father; but he found some visitors in the parlor, and his father and mother very busily engaged in conversation with them. So, after waiting about until his first excitement had a little subsided, he grew tired and sleepy, and concluded to go off to bed.

All this time, he never once thought of the key of the barn.

It was after midnight, when he was suddenly awakened by his father, who stood by his bedside with a lighted candle in his hand.

“Johnnie! Johnnie!” said he, in a hurried, anxious tone, “wake up!”

And then, when John started up in bed, and looked wildly about him, he asked, more calmly and deliberately, —

“Are you awake, Johnnie! Think. Can you tell me anything about the key of the barn?”

“Oh, — yes!” said Johnnie, in a startled, half-conscious tone; “I, — yes, — I dropped it, I believe. I’ll — go right and pick it up.”

“You dropped it! Are you awake, or dreaming, Johnnie? Did you have the key? And where did you drop it?”

“On the grass. By the path. When Stephen came. Why? What’s the matter, father?”

His father uttered a sound that was like a groan.

“Oh, Johnnie! Little Kathie is very ill. I was going to drive to the village for the doctor.”

“Oh, dear, father!” cried Johnnie, terror-

stricken. “What will you do? Can’t you get in at a window?”

“They are all strongly fastened, high up. I should lose time. I must walk.”

And he turned to go without further delay.

“Let *me* go, father!” cried John, springing out of bed. “I’ll run, — I’ll go quicker than any horse! I know the way.”

Mr. Osburn hesitated for an instant. He had already lost time. He disliked leaving his wife alone, in her anxiety, for so long a time as it would take him to walk to the village. Johnnie already had nearly all his clothes on.

His father passed out into the entry, and moved toward his wife’s dressing-room. She caught the sound of his step in the passage, and spoke.

“Are you there?” she asked, in a tone of surprise and anxiety. “You can’t surely have been already?”

Mr. Osburn decided. He turned back, quickly, to the door he had softly closed behind him, and as softly opened it.

“Go, Johnnie,” he whispered. “Take your shoes in your hand. Don’t let your mother hear you.”

And, almost in the same breath, he reached the dressing-room again, and answered Mrs. Osburn.

“I can stay with you, now. A person has just gone down toward the village, by whom I have sent the message.”

“Is it any one you know? Will he be sure to give it?”

“Oh, yes, quite sure; make yourself easy. I am very glad not to leave you alone.”

Meanwhile John went out into the midnight.

Under any other circumstances he would, perhaps, have been afraid for himself, as he passed out from his father’s gate into the high-road, where nothing else was moving, and where the glooms from tree and hedge lay so strangely.

All was still, — with an awful sort of quietness, — except the weird noises of the night, which only made everything else seem stiller.

Here and there a katydid chirped among the branches, and the frogs were piping in the brook. There seemed to be more stars blazing down upon him from the sky than he had ever seen before.

But Johnnie did not stop to think separately and consciously of any of these things. The strange midnight scene about him only deepened and made more terrible the one feeling,—that his little sister was in danger, and that by his fault help was delayed. What if she should die!

Down the hill to the brook his feet flew over the ground. Across the little bridge, with the booming of the great bull-frogs in his ears, he hurried on. Up the slope on the opposite side, he slackened a little to take breath; and then down again into the village, between the rows of quiet houses, where people were all lying in their beds asleep, he went, panting.

One woman, who happened to be wakeful, heard the quick thud, thud, of his feet upon the road, and put her nightcapped head out of the window.

“What’s the matter, boy? Fire?” she cried.

Johnnie did not try to answer. He was saving the little breath he had to call the doctor.

Doctor Doubleday heard the click of his garden-gate as it swung to behind the little messenger, and then the ring at the bell, pulled with all the strength of two small trembling hands.

“Who is it?” he called, from his room above.

“John Osburn,” shouted the boy, with a husky voice, from his long running. “My father wants you, sir, as quick as you can come! My sister’s sick.”

And down he sat, exhausted, on the door-stone.

The doctor pulled a cord in his chamber, and another bell sounded loudly through the house. This roused his man, who understood the signal, and in two minutes more the big barn-door slid back, and John knew the doctor’s gig was getting ready.

Hardly more than five minutes longer, and dexterous hands had slipped the horse into his harness, and the doctor had, as dexterously, slipped into his clothes. The gig came round to the garden-gate as he descended the stairs.

“ Jump in, little man,” said he, kindly. “ We’ll be there in no time.”

The curious woman put her nightcap out again between the blinds as the wheels rattled by.

“ Oh ! ” said she, as she drew it in again. “ Somebody after the doctor. Wonder who’s sick ! ”

The frogs piped, and the katydids chirped, the stars blazed on wondrously, and the shadows still stretched over the road, but all sounded and seemed different and less ghostly, now that Johnnie was in human companionship again, and was bringing swift help to Kathie. Still he said nothing, and hardly drew a long breath. Every nerve was tense with anxiety.

Mr. Osburn heard the wheels upon the

gravel, as they drove up to the door, and come down the front staircase with a light.

His first words were to Johnnie.

“You have done well, my boy,” said he, with his hand upon his son’s head. “And you have had a hard lesson. Now go quietly up the other staircase to your room and to bed. We won’t worry mamma about both children at once. Kathie is suffering less.”

Johnnie, with a great swelling in his throat, passed through the hall, and up the back stairway, as Doctor Doubleday ascended at the front with his father. But he *could* not go to bed while the doctor was in the house. He must know, first, something more about Kathie.

He crept around to the door of his mother’s dressing-room, and waited and listened. He heard, now and then, a little moan of pain, and once or twice his mother’s voice asking some question, and the doctor’s in reply.

He never knew himself how long he sat there; but it had been in reality nearly an hour, when suddenly he heard Kathie herself quite plainly say, —

“It don’t ache hardly any now, manima, I’m getting rested.”

And then, in a minute or two, he heard the doctor’s step across the chamber, and the opening of the farther door, and the sound of his voice through the entry, as he said, —

“I think she will continue comfortable now. Give her the drops once every hour, if she is awake; but let her sleep, if she will. I shall look in again in the course of the morning. I don’t think you will have any further trouble. It has been a pretty sharp case, though, and a little delay might have been a serious thing.”

Mr. Osburn accompanied the doctor down to the door, and returned by the back stairway to Johnnie’s room. To his surprise, he did not find him in bed. He went out into the passage again, and round toward the dressing-room.

There lay the boy upon the floor.

For the first and only time in his life, Johnnie had fainted away.

CHAPTER VII.

WOOD-PATHS.

JOHN had had a lesson. A lesson of fear. Such an one as impresses upon the mind some especial point of duty, which is not apt to be again neglected. He was warned, now, for his lifetime, against taking upon himself any trust, however small, and heedlessly failing in his obligation. He would doubtless be more careful, more faithful, henceforth, in matters involving a promise, or pledge. He would be pretty certain, at any rate, not to mislay or lose again the key of his father's barn.

But would he, in his general habits, be any more *orderly*?

Ah, the lessons of fear that we get, for the most part, teach us only to *avoid*, — and that certain special risks; not to *become*, — to attain higher and wholly.

It must be a lesson of *beauty* to teach us that.

In a few days Kathie was nearly well. Meantime, Johnnie quite devoted himself to her. All the gentle and affectionate side of his character was drawn out. The despised spools were collected, and he improvised numberless school and family scenes, in which they were made the puppets. They all had names; and by the hour at a time John sat by the little table that was drawn up for Kathie beside the bed, and manœuvred them for her amusement.

One morning, just as they were both growing rather tired of this employment, and Kathie had declared that she was "getting quite worn out with having so much care of all these children," and that she "believed she would send them off to bed, and read Rosamond awhile," John heard voices below inquiring for him, and on running down to the door found Stephen and Howard Sellinger.

"Come, Johnnie," said the former, "we

want you to go up into the High Pasture with us, to look for bird's nests. Howard wants some cedar-birds' eggs, and there are lots of 'em there."

"And then," added Howard, "we'll keep on, along the brook, up toward the woods, and find some vireos'."

"I've got ten eggs already for my collection," said Stephen, "and four or five duplicates that I'll give you. We got blue-birds', and robins', and cat-birds', in the lanes, yesterday; and wrens' and song-sparrows' just for stepping out of the house. There's a cunning little house-wren has built in our wood-shed, and laid seven eggs; and father let us take two of them, 'as an exception,' he said. There don't many birds lay such a lot for one hatching. I tell you it's jolly fun!"

John asked his mother's leave for the expedition, and whether he mightn't begin his collection to-day. After he had explained all that Howard and Stephen had told him about it, and adduced the arguments that

had had weight with Mr. Sellinger, Mrs. Osburn said that she saw no objection herself, provided they kept to the conditions; but she thought there would be great temptation, where three boys went exploring together, to secure more than one egg from a single nest. She gave him permission, however, to go and share in the expedition of this morning; but he was not to consider that full consent had been given for him to continue the pursuit, until his father also should have been consulted.

John agreed to all this; and the three boys, with a basket containing their luncheons, in case they should get so far from home as to remain out beyond the dinner-hour, set off, in high spirits, over Cedar Bridge.

Out in the pasture, and along the brookside, the air was full of the notes of different birds, that John, in his city-bred ignorance, could not distinguish from one another; and, had it not been for the assurances of Howard, he would no sooner have dreamed of the possibility of tracing them to their little, mysterious

homes, and spying out their domestic arrangements, than of finding the fairies, and getting a peep into Elf-land.

But Howard looked about him, and listened with a very confident air.

“Hark!” said he, presently, with a gesture for the others to pause. “There’s a brown thrush! I think he’s somewhere in that clump of bushes off at the right. Wait here a minute.”

John and Stephen stood still, and Howard moved cautiously on a little distance up the brook-side.

Presently, as he made his way among the bushes from which the sound proceeded, there was a sudden change in the character of the notes. They expressed fright and anxiety. Then there was a flutter of wings, and out from the little thicket flew, first the merry singer and then his mate, still circling in the air, however, around the spot, the male bird uttering a threatening and reproachful cry.

It was hardly a moment, however, that

Howard kept them in their suspense; for almost immediately he emerged again, as cautiously as he had entered, and came quickly back toward his companions. As he reached them, he held up his prize, — an egg, about as large as a robin's, of a greenish-white color, dusted thickly all over with little freckles of brown.

“ We'll get them the best way we can,” said he, “ and then divide spoils afterward. I went in, because I knew where to look, and just what sort of a nest to look for. There were three eggs, just one apiece if we had been rapacious enough to take 'em. The bird was n't sitting. They generally lay five, I believe. Maybe we'll find another nest before we go home. Now let's keep on up the hill, among the pines and hemlocks, and look after cedar-birds. Where's your box, Steenie?”

Stephen produced a box, filled partially with cotton-wool, wherein Howard placed the egg carefully, and then they kept on up over the slope of the pasture.

The sociable little cedar-birds, or waxwings, were there, as Stephen had said, "lots of 'em." It was just the place for them. Only a short flight either way took them into orchards and gardens on the one hand, and wide pastures on the other, where was promise of endless store of fruits and berries the summer long; and, meantime, there were raids to be made upon hordes of worms and slugs and caterpillars that would else spoil alike their feast and the farmer's profit. Back they would come, after these flights of forage and frolic, among the still, spicy evergreens, and gather coseyly in little groups, four or five on a branch, talking over, in a gentle, gossiping way, their late exploits, or pluming their feathers for another foray.

The boys went slowly along among the scattered trees, looking carefully up in each as they passed, and trusting, as Howard said, that "if they came upon one nest they'd be sure to find more, for these little fellows almost always build in neighborhoods."

They got farther in, among the cedars and

pinces that belted the pasture, — where it was stiller and more shady, — and by-and-by, in the first crotch of a cedar-tree, at least fourteen feet from the ground, Howard's observant eye caught glimpse of a little nest, securely lodged, and built of grass and roots and bits of pine and hemlock.

“ There it is ! ” he cried, “ and the thing is now to get at it ! The little robbers are like the old scribes, — they like high seats in the synagogue. Steenie, can you shin ? ”

“ Try me and see,” replied Steenie.

“ We're like the three brothers that always went travelling together, in the old fairy tales,” said Howard. “ What one can't do another can. It'll be your turn next, Johnnie.”

“ I don't see what I can do,” answered Johnnie, with a shade of dissatisfaction, as he looked up at Stephen, who had got, by this time, hand over hand, half way up the tree. “ I can't climb much — yet,” he added, with an emphasis that seemed to imply he didn't mean to be a great while learning.





“Oh, you’ll do it in a week as well as Steenic. Well, old fellow, what d’ye see?”

“I see four eggs,” replied Stephen. “The bird’s off.”

“Drop one into my cap,” said Howard, holding it up, high above his head.

Down came a little, grayish egg, splashed with dark brown spots, into the very middle of the soft crown of the cap; and down came Stephen, like a lamplighter along the side of his ladder.

Searching still, from tree to tree, they found, within a short distance, two other nests, of like situation and construction, as Howard had predicted; and taking an egg from each, that each boy might have a specimen, they passed on, along the open ridge of high land, beyond the trees, quite elated with their success.

It was a long tramp, and the least pleasant part of their excursion, over the backbone of the hill, around toward the western slope that brought them down into the edge of pleasant woods again, where they struck

the course of the brook, and presently would have to cross the high road, which here passed through a fragrant grove of pine. Beyond, they would keep on, until they had made a large circuit, of which Mr. Osburn's house was very nearly the centre, and would emerge by the old oak, near Farmer Simmons's field where Howard traced the night-hawk, and so home, through the lane.

They were very glad, when they reached the shelter of the wood by the brook, to sit down for a while, and eat the luncheon from their basket, and have a drink of cool water from the tin cup that was tied to its handle.

"I suppose," said Howard, as he threw himself down against the mossy knoll at the foot of a chestnut, "if we had looked about for them, we might have found che-winks' nests up there on the ridge. It's just the place for them. But the sun was so blazing hot, it would hardly pay. We'll go there some other time, when it's cooler, or earlier or later in the day. They hide their nests very cunningly on the ground.

You might stumble right into one, before you saw it."

"Did you find the night-hawk's nest, the other day?" asked John.

"No *nest*," answered Howard. "They don't care for such conveniences. Two great, muddy-looking, speckled eggs, just tumbled together in the gravel. And I had the greatest luck, coming back, over the farmer's field. Just in the edge of his rye, I started up a bobolink. They're among the very rarest sort of nests to find. You never know where to look for them. They're just like any other patch of grass, and the birds generally keep so still and close,—sometimes, even, if you're right upon them. However, Mrs. Lincoln skedaddled this time, and one of her little, blotchy eggs is safe in my box at home."

After the boys were well rested and refreshed, they set off once more, across the brook, and plunged again, beyond, into the deep, green wood, through which lay their circuit home, and among whose leafy nooks,

they knew, were lodged invisibly, all about them, the little dwellings of which they had come in search.

There was something in the still beauty and seclusion of the forest that impressed Johnnie, who had lived nearly all his life in the bareness and bustle of city streets, very strongly and wonderfully. It was like walking, wide awake, into a dream. He saw and felt what heretofore had only come to him through his imagination; and a whole infinity of life and delight seemed opening before him, as he came to know what a world was lying close around him; that the real, veritable woods, where the birds and squirrels truly lived, and might any day be seen and watched, were thus within only a ten or fifteen minutes' ramble from his father's door.

He had been used to walk down to the Charles River, and look away, over its blue waters, to the shores of Roxbury and Cambridge, where "the country began," with a feeling that a great wealth and mystery lay

somewhere there in the distance, — fields and forests, such as he read of in his story-books, but never expected to get really into, any more than he thought of ever travelling off to the westward far enough to put his hand upon the blue sky that seemed to drop down there, away off, and rest against the hills. He had nearer glimpses, sometimes, when he took summer drives with his father and mother; but such a spot as this he had never, in all the ten years of his life, been let loose in before.

The very breath of the forest, that came through oaks and pines and beeches and chestnuts, and over beds of fern and moss, touched him with a sort of awe, as if the solitudes it was born in had made it almost holy. It gave him the same feeling — though he did not analyze his sensations, or compare them together, as I am doing — that he once had, when he got into a great city church on a week-day, and explored the choir, and felt the organ pipes, and climbed up into the pulpit, and laid his hand, with

a childish reverence, on the minister's great Bible.

All about them they heard, at intervals, the various songs of the forest birds. The tiny wood-sparrow trilled its simple strain unceasingly. The shy quail called out, from the underbrush, "More wet! More wet!" Now and then, the piercing "chee, chee!" of the oven-bird was reiterated in a shrill crescendo; and the vireo, with untiring warble, seemed to overflow in irrepressible music.

If John had come here merely for a walk, and the pleasantness of it, he would have just noticed, probably, that the birds were singing, and that would have been all. He would not have received separate impressions of the different notes. But as his companions distinguished them, and named the birds, one after another, through their recognition of the songs, his wonder and his interest grew greater; and he peered with curious eyes in bush and branch, to get, if he might, a "sight-acquaintance" with the little, winged people.

“Look well under your feet, boys,” said Howard, “and among the bushes. We shall very likely come upon a partridge-nest; and if we *could* only light upon an oven-bird’s!”

They did find the former, and not very long after Howard had spoken; but they were not to have all their good luck in one day. The oven-bird’s nest is by no means to be met with every time one walks in a wood.

The partridge-nest was a little hollow scratched out under a bush, and lined with grass and leaves. The shy and crafty little mother, on the approach of their accidental footsteps, had scrambled hastily from off her eggs; and they first caught sight of her, limping about among the underbrush, and poking her head here and there, in every direction but the right one, as if she really could n’t find her own nest.

“Just go the way she does n’t,” said Howard. “That’s the way to manage cunning folks. You must always take them by contraries. She started from somewhere here.”

And looking closely into the little thicket where they first surprised her, and away from which she was artfully trying to lead them, they found her treasure, — more than a dozen dainty, cream-colored eggs.

Such abundance was hard for the boys to resist.

“I’m sure,” said Stephen, “my father would say this might be an exception to the rule. If we can take one egg where there are only two or three, I should think we might take three out of a dozen, — should n’t you?”

Howard didn’t know. He supposed they ought not to make the exceptions themselves.

John was looking with longing eyes at the nest; but for a minute or two he was quite silent. He was trying to settle the question between his judgment and his conscience. He could see no *reason* why they might not each take an egg, if Mr. Sellinger had not objected to taking two from the wren’s nest, where there were seven. He

felt very sure, if his mother were there, she would release him from his promise in this case; but still,—it was a *promise*. John, with whatever other faults he might have, was honest.

He put his hands in his pockets, and turned off rather quickly, at last; speaking out his conclusion with a little gruffness that betokened the effort he had made.

“Any way,” said he, “*I* can’t have one. I promised my mother I would not take any from the same nest you did; and I suppose it don’t make any difference whether there’s two or twenty.”

“Well,” said Howard, “I suppose I might manage it, if I had a mind. *I* have n’t made any promise; and my father always lets me judge whether it will do to take more than one. He knows I never *rob* a nest. But I don’t like anything that looks like dodging.”

So they came to the decision, at last, to take but one; but to note the spot, and report the whole case at home, and if permis-

sion were given, to come back again for two more eggs.

This turned out to have been the very wisest way possible; for Mr. Sellinger and Mr. Osburn were convinced by this scrupulousness as to the letter of the promise that the boys might be trusted to keep it in its spirit; and they were allowed to govern themselves in all such cases, thenceforth, by Howard's judgment on the spot. If they had taken an unauthorized latitude, on this first day of their birds'-nesting excursions, with however good a show of reason, their parents might have distrusted the tendency of the whole thing. As it was, by refraining from the inch, they gained the ell; and their honesty and good faith proved, emphatically, their best policy.

“What is that?” exclaimed John, catching Howard by the arm, and checking him in his walk, as he pointed to the trunk of a tall, dead pine, up which, round and round, —pausing here and there, and tapping so-

norously upon the hollow stem,—something black and white was crawling, so close to the tree, that at first Johnnie could hardly make out whether it really were a bird or not.

“Oh, that’s a woodpecker! Let me see! A hairy woodpecker, I think. I wish we could find his nest. They dig way into a dead branch, or a rotten fence-post. Sometimes you’ll find one in a hollow stump. I’m afraid that fellow has got his pretty safe out of our reach, if it’s anywhere about that old shell he’s climbing.”

The pine-tree was very tall, and had been broken off at the top. They could discover nothing that looked like an opening as far as they could see up the sides of the stem; and Stephen thought it would be rather useless trying to “shin” after the woodpecker; who, while they were talking, had reached the very summit, and sat there, in proud inaccessibility, uttering a shrill whistle, as if of triumph.

“I would n’t give up,” said John. “We

might hunt out his nest, somewhere, maybe. I don't believe it's way up there."

"Oh, you'll soon find out," said Howard, "that seeing a bird is n't finding his nest, by any means. We see a good deal in this world that we never get at."

Which was a very sententious utterance for a boy of fourteen.

The wood-path they followed next led them down over a rough, rocky slope, through a thicket of savin and other bushes, till they came out into a lovely, wild, little opening, where, from between high banks at the left, poured down over its narrow bed of stones and moss one of the scores of little, singing, gurgling streams that, fed by hidden springs in the deep heart of the wood, strayed hither and thither, falling from hollow to hollow, among the shadows, or glancing out suddenly into the sunlight, till they found their way to The Brook, *par eminence*, that gathered them all in, and bustled on to carry its accumulated wealth to the great River.

Ferns and herbs grew close down and into

its edges, and tall wood-grasses bent down their lithe spires into its ripples, and drifted out their full length on the current; and the water drew to itself their wild juices, and turned a deep, clear, coffee-brown; and so poured itself—rich in who knows what elixirs of healing—out and on among the sedges, between which it spread into little, dusky pools, and seemed to pause a space to take breath and determine whither next.

“That’s what old Aunt Patty Pulsifer would call ‘yarb tea,’” said Stephen, as he bestrode the stream just where it leaped out from the last shady nook into the shallow. “Have a drink?” and he caught up a dipper-full, and offered it to Johnnie.

John threw out his hand, with a backward movement, that sent the dipper whirling up into an alder bush, and the water showering about in scattered drops, to find its level, and creep into the current again as best it might.

“Hallo, Johnnie!” cried out Howard,

from a clump of bushes higher up. "Here's a chance for the youngest of the three brothers, at last! Come here, will you?"

John hastened up to where Howard was standing, on a gray, mossy rock, above which, high over his head, swung from the outmost forked twig of a young maple-tree, that sprung, tall and graceful, from behind the feathery birches, a little pouch-shaped nest, whose outside was curiously filigreed with bits of mosses, gray and green, on a foundation of thin strips of birch-bark, twined round and round, and glued firmly at the top, across the angle of the maple-spray.

"There's what I've been looking for all day," said Howard. "A vireo's nest. And you're just the boy to get the first peep into it."

"I don't see how," said Johnnie. "Unless I could fly."

"Brains are a match for wings, sometimes; and for a good many other things, that for that reason we needn't have the





trouble of," said Howard. "See here! Can you climb up on my shoulders?"

He knelt down for a moment, while John scrambled up, as if for a ride "pick-back," and seated himself astride. Howard held him by the legs, and raised himself, with some effort, to his feet again, thus bringing Johnnie comfortably up to the necessary height for grasping and bending down the branch. Which having done, he peeped eagerly into the soft interior of the pretty nest, lined with grass and dry pine leaves, and reported four eggs.

"Four?" exclaimed Howard. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, sure," replied John. "But they're not all alike. Three of 'em are beauties, — white, with two or three little brown spots on one end; the other is bigger, and speckled all over, like the thrush's egg."

"Good!" cried Howard. "That's a cow-bunting! Out with it, and one of the vireo's too!"

"Two?" asked Johnnie. "Shall I?"

"Yes, to be sure; and make haste," said Howard, who had played Atlas almost long enough.

John slid down to the ground, as Howard stooped and put him off his shoulders, with an egg in each hand.

"You see," said Howard "the cow-bunting is a bird that hasn't a right to any sort of consideration. She never builds a nest, or takes care of her eggs after she lays them. She just leaves them round on charity, to be hatched or not, as it happens; and it's no robbery to take them wherever you find them. In fact, it's a kindness to the other poor birds that get so imposed on. I think we've had uncommon luck, for one day," he continued, as Steenie came up with the box, and received the double addition to their gains. "A thrush, three cedar-birds, a partridge, a vireo, and a cow-bunting!"

"If we don't get any more, we can't divide 'em even," said Steenie. "Three into seven goes twice, and a cow-bunting over! Who'll have that?"

“Suppose we wait till we find out whether we are to get a couple more partridge-eggs, and then we shall each have one of them, and a cedar-bird’s; and we’ll draw lots for the choice of the others.”

“That’s it!” cried Stephen. “Bully for you, Howard!”

They kept on, across the little runnel of “yarb tea,” and around through the woods, that were thinning, now, toward the fields, and came out as Howard had proposed, a little beyond the old oak with the withered branch, near which he had found the night-hawk’s eggs, a few days before.

Along by the rye-field, they met Farmer Simmons.

“Well, boys,” said he, “been eggin’? It’s astonishin’ what takes the youngsters, all at once, and all together! Here’s my boy comes to me, chock full of it, a week or two ago, — the fellers up to the ’cademy started the idee, — an’ now, here’s a chap all the way from New York, sharp-set after the same identical thing! Wonder how they telegraph it

round! Wish our Gin'ral's could git up the same sort of a 'secret understandin'! Guess, if they did, they might do a pretty smart stroke o' birds'-nestin', round there, down South!”

CHAPTER VIII.

AT LOOSE ENDS.

JOHN'S days were not all days to be "marked with a white stone," as the last. He had his days of trouble, still. Life isn't all a ramble in the wildwood, even to a boy of ten, rejoicing in his first summer in a country home.

During the past week which they had spent in the city, John had continued at his school, and had brought home with him, from day to day, his various items of school property. Books of only occasional use, with some story-books that had been lent to his companions, were first collected, and these became included in the packing of his mother's library. His slate and pencils, copy-book, spelling-book, and so forth, were only brought home the very day before

the final removal, and went to make up the list of miscellanies that he himself collected and bestowed at the last, — many of them, as we have seen, going to complete the filling of his trunk, and being heedlessly thrown together, at his unpacking, on the floor of his wardrobe.

He had never, as yet, taken the trouble to gather together and arrange all these volumes and articles, for future use.

Consequently, when his father said, — as he did two or three times during the period he had spent in the various enterprises and amusements I have been describing, — “ Well, Johnnie, we must have a little studying pretty soon. It won’t do to forget the lessons altogether. All play and no work makes Jack a mere toy,” — it gave John a feeling of vague discomfort and disrelish, quite apart from any unwillingness to employ in study the small portion of time that would be required.

He didn’t know exactly where anything was.

How much important work in the world, I wonder, has been put off and neglected and sacrificed for just such reasons?

At last, one morning, the fiat went forth. And, as will often happen, it came, as John thought, exactly at the wrong time.

Howard and Stephen had a famous plan arranged for "fishing" after swallows' eggs; and this morning they were to carry it into execution, and had begged Johnnie to come over and see how their contrivance worked.

The nests were some six feet below the top of the Sellingers' great back-kitchen chimney, which was hardly ever used; and Howard had tied some cotton-wool to the end of a stick, of the necessary length to reach them, and was to wet it with gluten, whereby he hoped a gentle dip into a nest would cause the eggs to adhere, and bring one or more of them safely up. John was very curious to see it done.

But that very morning, as he left the breakfast-table, Mr. Osburn said to him, —

"John, this is Monday. You must begin

this week with a little steady employment. I don't expect *much*; but what I do require of you, I shall require strictly. Bring me your 'Greenleaf.'"

John never gave any "glum looks" to his father. He would not have dared. But his face by no means expressed alacrity or willingness, as he replied, —

"Why, father, I don't know where it is, I'm sure. And I don't believe I've got any slate-pencil."

"I put some of your books, Johnnie, in the little chimney cupboard in my room, when I unpacked the box," said his mother. "If you look there, I dare say you will find 'Greenleaf' among them. And I rather think you will discover a slate-pencil or two somewhere among your sundries."

John walked off up stairs, not in the least as he would have gone, if it had been a question of birds' eggs; and, rather to his secret disappointment, found the book, without any difficulty at all, just where his mother had said.

“Well; how far have you ‘gone,’ Johnnie, as the boys say!” asked Mr. Osburn, taking the well-thumbed Arithmetic in his hand. “About thus far, I imagine.” And he opened where there was a tolerably distinct division between the soiled and the clean portions of the volume. “This seems to be about the tide-mark.”

“I’d got through Reduction,” said Johnnie, “and was just going into Addition of Compound Numbers.”

“Yes, this is just the place,” said his father. “Very well; it is always better, I think, in recommencing any study, or even the reading of a book, to begin a little back of where one left off. It makes a surer join. The new knowledge holds better to the old. That’s the way you find it in your seams, don’t you, mother?” he added, playfully, to Mrs. Osburn. “So, Johnnie, if you please, I’ll try you with a lesson in Miscellaneous Exercises in Reduction. You may begin with these sums that have the answers attached, so that you may be sure your work is

done before you leave it. You can take from No. 39 to the end of the page, can't you, since you have gone over the ground so lately?"

"I suppose so," said Johnnie, rather dolefully.

"Your mother will give you a sheet of paper and a pencil; and, as you finish the working of each sum upon your slate, you may copy it carefully upon the paper, and have them all in readiness to show to me when I come home."

"I advise you, Johnnie," said Mrs. Osburn, "to go right to your room, and set resolutely about it."

"Can I go over to Stephen Sellinger's, just a little while, first? He wanted me to come this morning, to help him get some swallows' eggs."

"You may do as you think best," said Mr. Osburn. "I should advise you, as your mother says, to go right up-stairs and attend to your work, first; and then play, with an easy mind afterward."

“ Oh, I shall have plenty of time to do the sums,” said John, “ after I come back. And then my mind will be easy for *them*, you know. I sha’ n’t be gone long.”

“ Very well,” said his father, smiling. “ Only you might lose more by putting off, than by taking the time now. You can’t tell exactly how long the sums may occupy you, nor what you may be wishing to do by-and-by. You are not working by the hour, but by the job, remember.”

“ Oh, yes, I know,” replied Johnnie, brightening up into great cheerfulness. “ I’ll do them the first thing after I come back.”

And in three minutes more, he was in Mr. Sellinger’s yard.

His mother took up the “ Greenleaf ” from the breakfast-table, and carried it up-stairs to her room. Her look was a little doubtful and foreboding. She had some reason to fear that the hardest part of the “ job,” that day, might be her own.

Half an hour later, over in Mr. Sellinger’s yard, the boys were just at the critical and

exciting point of their extraordinary undertaking.

A ladder had been raised to the top of the kitchen porch, and rested against the eaves of the building. A man had climbed, by this, to the roof, and was cautiously drawing up after him a second and shorter ladder, which Howard, standing on the flat-roof of the porch, reached up to him. This second ladder had lost a rung at one end, which made it all the more convenient for their purpose. The man, after he had safely drawn it up, rested it against the sloping roof, with the two ends in the gutter, and climbed, himself, cautiously, to the ridge-pole; where he once more drew the ladder after him, and placed it, now, against the chimney; the length of the two sides, beyond the lowest remaining rung, which rested across the ridge-pole, allowing it to be planted firmly upon the shingles.

When he had fixed it thus, as securely as he could, the man seated himself, astride, upon the apex of the roof, between the lad-

der and the chimney, grasping the former firmly, with both his hands.

“Now, my man!” he called out to Howard, who was standing at the top of the first ladder, with his long stick in his hand.

John and Stephen had clambered up the grape-vine trellis to the roof of the porch; and Stephen stood already, — like many an older aspirant, — with feet upon the lower rounds of the ladder, waiting for him at the top to step from his position that he might instantly mount and take it; and now he echoed excitedly the call.

“Yes, — up with you, How’, and give a fellow a chance!”

Howard reached his magician’s wand, that was to draw such wonders from the depths, up to his assistant on the ridge-pole; and then, carefully, with hands and feet, climbed up over the shingles to the foot of the second ladder, calling back, as he did so, to the boys behind, —

“No farther, mind! You’re not to get upon the roof, you know!”

Mr. Sellinger had consented to this exploit, only on condition that no one but Howard himself, and the man who was to assist him, should go upon the top of the building.

So, while Howard, poising his rod in one hand, ascended to the top of the chimney, Stephen and John, with heads one above the other at the eaves, looked up after him, breathless and expectant.

“Ahraacadabra — aldoborondi — foskoformia — hifalutin — jibbenainosay --- ronzedevolly — boo!” cried Howard, aloft, brandishing his rod with an air of mystery and might, like a wizard uttering his enchantments.

“Chip, chip, cheep! Chee! Chee-e!” chattered the swallows, circling above him in the air, and wondering, possibly, if the end of the world had come.

Peering down, then, into the murk of the great chimney, and pausing a moment, until his eyes became accustomed to the dimness within, and he could discern the rough,

basket-like nests of twigs that were built against its sides, Howard let the stick slide carefully through his fingers, straight down, until the wad of cotton at the end, well saturated with gluten, went plumb into the middle of a nest. Cautiously, and almost breathlessly, he drew it up again, like a man sounding with greased plummet for golden sands; and lo! safely adhering to the sticky knob, came up into view three tiny, clear-white, slender-oval eggs! His ingenuity had triumphed.

With one hand he dexterously transferred them to his jacket-pocket, while with the other he suddenly launched the stick, like a javelin, over the heads of the rest of the party below, and away out upon the grass-plat.

The other boys had hardly begun to think of the feat being accomplished, when all was done. It was really quite like a stroke of legerdemain.

“Hallo!” cried John, who from his position could not watch the proceeding so nar-

rowly as he would have liked, “ What’s the matter, now? Can’t you do it?”

“ Do it? It’s done! Clear the la-la!”

Down went Johnnie and Stephen, by ladder and trellis; down came Howard, heedfully, over the shingles, and after them to the ground; and, lastly, down came man and ladders.

“ I’m afraid I’ve robbed the nest, this time,” said Howard, as he displayed his treasures to the others. “ But I could n’t help it. I had to take my chance about that, — hit or miss, — neck or nothing!”

“ What a jolly dodge it was, though!” cried Stephen, in great glee, as he turned his egg over in his hand.

“ Now for a grand blow-out!” said Howard. “ I’ve got all those eggs to attend to that we brought home yesterday and the day before, and then we’ll divide ’em. Come up to my room.”

John hesitated. He knew he ought to go home to his lessons. And yet there was a long morning before him still; and it surely

would n't take a great while to blow a dozen eggs, or so. Besides, he ought to see Howard do it, so that he might learn how. It is a nice and difficult thing to do, to empty successfully these tiny, delicate shells, and keep the specimens perfect.

The three boys entered the house together, and passed up-stairs; though Johnnie's conscience still tugged at his footsteps, and made them lag a little.

Howard's room was a very pleasant place to look at. Not that it was particularly elegant in point of furnishing; Mr. Sellinger was not a rich man, and this was not even the "best chamber." But, wherever Howard was, there was always evident the spirit of order. And so, of beauty.

Nothing was left lying about, out of place. There was neither stick, nor scrap, nor string, upon the carpet. Chairs stood in their proper places, the lid of his trunk was down, closet-door and bureau-drawers were duly closed, and no ends peeped out to betray their contents.

The house-maid said, “ it was no work at all to take care of Master Howard’s room. There was never nothing to pick up ; and she believed the very dust did n’t settle there like it did in the rest part of the house.”

And yet Howard, as you must have seen, was not a boy to be called a “ cot-betty.” Manful, enterprising, efficient, — no such title of derision could possibly attach to him.

By the head of his bed, against a window that looked out upon the porch wherefrom they had just descended, and was overhung with the green drapery of the grape-vine, stood a small table ; and upon this, along its further side, was ranged a row of books, set up on their edges, in the order of their size.

John read their titles with a growing feeling of respect.

“ Leverett’s Lexicon ” and “ Gould’s Virgil ; ” “ Sherwin’s Algebra,” a work on Geology, and one on Natural Philosophy ; “ Nuttall’s Ornithology,” “ Shakspeare,” and “ The Bible.”

Before these, laid neatly one upon another, were two Atlases, — one of the usual maps, and the other of Physical Geography, — a portfolio, and a slate, with sponge and nicely-sharpened pencil fastened to it by a cord.

“What a capital window this is!” cried Johnnie. “I wish I had such a nice place to do my studying in. Do you have all these lessons in vacation?”

“School was n’t to break up for four or five weeks when I came away,” said Howard. “But I had n’t been very well in the spring; and I wanted so much to be in the country in egging-time, that father said I might come up here now, if I would promise him to learn certain lessons every day, until vacation. He said he should *trust* me to do it, and so I’m on honor, you see.”

“Well, I’m sure I should n’t mind it a bit, in such a nice place as this, and things so handy.”

Johnnie thought, as he spoke, with an inward recoil, of the task that awaited him at

home, of the slate and pencil that were to be hunted up, — a vague idea, moreover, haunting him that the slate had slipped out of its frame, and that the latter was n't "anywhere." It seemed as if Howard's studying and his own were two very different affairs. And so, in truth, they were.

"Here are the eggs," said Howard, taking the box from a shelf in the closet, wherein, carefully bedded in cotton, lay the beautiful spoils of the last few days. "And now don't touch me, or speak to me. Only look."

It was interesting to watch, as he cautiously punctured the tinted shells at each end with the point of a long needle, which he turned gently, like an awl, with a gradual pressure, until he bored it through; and then, putting his lips to the smaller ends, blew out their contents, one after another, into his washing-basin. He did it slowly and patiently, Stephen and John keeping quite still at his side, and "only looking," as he had said. Only one egg got slightly cracked in the process, and that Howard mended with

a slip of transparent sticking-plaster. In two or three, was a bird partially formed, but of a pulpy, gelatinous consistency, only ; and the breath gradually expelled it successfully from the shell. The head and bill, and the round mass of the body, were plainly discernible in the substance that was ejected.

John looked on with a curious wonder and delight till all was finished, and Howard distributed to each his share, — all drawing lots for choice among those of which there were no duplicates. How light the empty little bubbles felt ! Then he waited to see Howard deposit his own in the larger box which he took from his bureau ; and which contained his whole collection. There they lay, on a bed of sawdust, nearly fifty of them. of differing sizes and hues, — from the great white egg of a Canada goose, to the tiny, speckled morsel of the house-wren.

“ I’m having a box made on purpose, at the cabinet-maker’s in the village,” said Howard, “ of black walnut, divided into compartments ; and they are to be filled half-way with

black-walnut sawdust. The eggs look splendidly against the dark color."

Johnnie felt a sort of uncomfortable excitement as Howard said this, that was partly an eager wish to have just such an one himself, combined with an instinctive doubt as to whether his father would think it worth while; and partly a feeling that went further back, suggesting dimly the incongruity between this and the generality of his other arrangements.

With Howard, everything was fit and in keeping. It was easy and natural for him to go on, adding, as he had opportunity, to his possessions, things of convenience and ornament. He had begun at the beginning, and laid his foundation of order and nicety; and all fell in appropriately. John did not reason just so about it; perhaps he scarcely understood his own intuitive perception; but the vague discomfort he felt admonished him of this and nothing else.

He felt more disinclined than ever to leave his friends, and Howard's pleasant room, and

go home, where was work to do, and nothing ready for doing it. He loitered, looking over the eggs, admiring and asking questions, until at last Howard said, good-naturedly, laying the box back in the drawer, —

“There, I can’t tell you any more, now. It’s time for me to be at my Virgil.”

“And I’ll go and get the ‘Young Voyageurs,’ and come and sit here while you study; shall I?” asked Stephen.

“Yes,” returned Howard. “Only mum’s the word, remember.”

“All right,” said Stephen. “Come on, Johnnie.” And he led the way out of the room, and down the stairs.

John bade him good-by, and left the house. Slowly he walked down the garden-path, and into the bit of lane, from which the little gateway opened upon the foot-path below his father’s barn.

Jacob stood in the great south door-way, cleaning a harness that hung over the bar.

“Seems to me, yer don’t come back as spry as yer went,” said he as John was pass-

ing along. “ What’s the matter? Got lead in yer boots?”

“ No,” said John, laughing. “ But I’ve got my hands full of birds’ eggs. And then, — oh, dear me, Jacob! Have you got a slate-pencil?”

“ Oh, ho! That’s the triberlation, is it? Got some cipherin’ tew dew, I guess! Wal, — no, — I ha’ n’t got no slate-pencil. Ha’ n’t hed none sence I went ter deestrick school, ten year ago, up in Henniker. When I hev any cipherin’ ter dew, I jest scratch it aout, with a piece o’ chalk, on a board. Comes as handy’s any way. How many eggs yer got?”

“ Six. Look at this blue cat-bird’s. Isn’t it a beauty?”

“ Didg’ ever see a night-heron’s?” asked Jacob. “ That’s abaout’s harnsome’n egg’s I knows on. ’N’ I know a place, tew, where yer might get ’em. On’y ’t’s an awful long way off, an’ a nasty kind of a situation when yergit there. A great, dark, lonesome, muggy, musty swamp. Real scary kind of a place.

But there's a great colony of herons there, up'n the old pines."

"Oh, Jacob! how jolly!" exclaimed Johnnie. "We'll go! How big are the eggs? And what color are they?"

"Kind of a light yaller green. Bigger'n a pullet's. Clear an' smooth. Not a spot on 'em."

"Oh, Jacob!" repeated John, ecstatically. "Where?"

"Way up on the road to Pontaug. Five mile, sartin. Turn off from the road, right inter the swamp, an' go ahead, tell yer find 'em, — or slump!"

"Slump! Poh, ho! Catch us slumping!"

"Tell yer what," said Jacob, giving a last polish, with a bit of wash-leather, to the silver rings in the saddle; "best way'll be, ef yer father's willin', jest ter take me'n the wagon 'long, some day. P'raps yer might want'a hist, now 'n' then, over the stumps. An' them air pines is pooty tall climbin', tew, I tell yer!"

“We might take a ladder with us, in the wagon,” suggested John.

“Yes, we might. But I ruther guess we ’d hev ter *keep* it in the wagon. An’ ’t would n’t be likely ter dew much good, ’n sech a case. Yer’ll dew well enough, ef yer git yer own legs ter the place, let alone ladders.”

“Well, anyhow, we’ll go; won’t we, Jacob?”

“Purvidin’,” replied Jacob, sententiously.

“I wonder if we could n’t go to-morrow?” pursued Johnnie.

“I wonder haow much cipherin’ yer’ve got ter dew, ter-day?” rejoined Jacob. “You jest tend ter that, naow, fer a spell; an’, mebbe, we’ll go this arternoon. Mind, I say, *mebbe*; I don’t say sartin; though I don’t see nuthin ter hender, ’s the man said ’baout the water comin’ over Nyaggery Falls. Yer father’s comin’ aout ’n the noon train, an’ ouless he’s figgered aout sunthin else fer yer, p’raps he won’t hev no ’bjection ter that.”

For a minute or two, John seemed seized with a sudden madness.

First he rushed a little way down the path toward the lane, again; then, struck by a new consideration, he stopped short and turned around; then he stopped again, with a very uncertain, perplexed expression; then he suddenly broke into a run again, and rushed, without pausing, up the lawn, into the house, and called out frantically to Mrs. Osburn, from the dining-room, where he had given just one hurried glance around, —

“Mother! Mother! Where are you? Are you up-stairs? Where’s my ‘Greenleaf’?”

Mrs. Osburn did not answer.

John had a habit, which boys are rather apt to fall into, of behaving as if his mother were a sort of ubiquitous household presence, to be invoked anywhere, and at any moment within doors. He would come in, as he had now done, at the extreme end of the house, and commence shouting, “Mother! Mother!” almost as soon as he stepped over the threshold, — continuing to call with more and more impatience in his voice, dur-

ing his whole progress through hall, parlor, and up the staircase, — never reflecting that his mother might by no means feel inclined to a like exercise of the lungs, or even that she might chance to be lying down, or talking with a friend, or occupied in any one of a dozen different ways that would make such vociferation after her a very unpleasant interruption.

So she had come to the resolution, and given Johnnie to understand, that she should not attempt to answer him, until he came where she was. On an occasion like this, it really did not matter to him; — the calling was a mere affair of habit; he was going upstairs in any case; but there might be circumstances in which he would really be seriously inconvenienced, by not being able to speak to her from the foot of the staircase, or from a neighboring room, and obtain an answer. People are obliged, sometimes, to speak to each other in such a manner; and when they never do so unnecessarily, no one objects to save trouble by replying in a voice

adequate to the distance. John deprived himself of the resource in emergency, by making it, heedlessly, an invariable practice.

He got half way up-stairs before he remembered this maternal edict, and desisted from his effort to obtain a reply; and then it was with irritation, and a muttering of, —

“I should think you might answer a fellow, anyhow!” — not actually intended, or not to be considered as intended, for his mother’s ear, yet reaching her none the less, as of course he knew it would be likely to do.

Still she sat placidly sewing as if she had heard nothing from first to last, when John entered the room.

“I want my ‘Greenleaf,’” said he, gruffly.

“There it is, upon the table. Do you know how late you are?”

John glanced at the clock upon the mantel-piece. — It was past eleven.

“Oh dear me!” he exclaimed, crossly.

“It’s too hot to do sums.”

“ Is n't it too hot to wear your cap in the house, Johnnie ? ”

“ I've got my hands full.”

John did not stop to show his mother the eggs, and claim admiring congratulation for them, as he usually did ; but walked off, through the dressing-room, to his own chamber. Things were not going on pleasantly.

He put his eggs into the pasteboard-box his mother had given him, bedded with cotton to lay them in, which he kept on a high shelf in his wardrobe. This, at least, he was obliged to be careful of. A very little thing might crush the whole.

Then he began his search for slate and pencil. He found the former, as he had expected, among the heap of articles on the floor of his wardrobe ; but without a frame, and the pencil was nowhere to be seen. He tumbled over drawers, — he felt in pockets, — he shook and stirred everything into worse and worse confusion ; but no pencil was forthcoming.

Ah ! order is often more than money ! A

cent or two would buy pencil enough to last a year, but fifty dollars would n't bring Johnnie an inch just at the instant when he wanted it so much!

"Mother!" said he despairingly, as he returned to her chamber at last, "I can't find a slate-pencil anywhere! There is n't one in the house."

His mother rose from her seat, and walked over to a little table that stood in a corner of the room. There was a drawer in this table that was used for the reception of all sorts of small stray articles. These she looked over, but even here was no slate-pencil.

"I don't know what you'll do, Johnnie," she said. "The time is growing short. You had better begin in some way. I will give you a sheet of foolscap, and you may work out your sums on that, and then copy them upon this," showing him a nice, smooth sheet of white paper, which, with a carefully sharpened lead-pencil, she had laid in readiness for him, with his "Greenleaf."

"I never can do sums on paper," said

John, disconsolately. “I make ten times as many mistakes when I can’t rub out.”

“Why, what has become of your slate-frame?” inquired his mother, noticing suddenly the slate he held in his hand.

“It came off the last day at school,” said John. “I brought it home in my satchel, but I don’t know where it went to afterward. ’Tis n’t there now.”

“Wasn’t your pencil tied to the frame?”

“Yes; but it kept slipping out of the string. I’ll tell you!” said he, brightening up; “I’ll run back to Steenie’s, and get him to lend me one.”

“That’s a bad plan, — depending on your neighbors,” replied his mother.

“Oh, I dare say he’s got half-a-dozen. If he has n’t, Howard has.”

“Nevertheless, if I allow you to borrow one this once, you must take it back to him, directly you have done with it. That will give you some trouble. And before to-morrow you must go and get some for yourself. Will you be sure to remember?”

“ Oh, yes ; I ’ll be sure,” replied Johnnie, throwing his slate on the sofa, and hurrying off to his room after his cap.

It was nearly twelve when he came back, and really began upon his work.

There had been no delay in obtaining the pencil. Howard had produced from his table-drawer an oblong box, neatly stored with pens and pencils, and supplied him at once ; but John lingered to communicate Jacob’s wonderful intelligence of the heronry, and the plan of visiting the swamp ; and even Howard could not resist listening and asking questions. In fact, the three boys were in a state of such excitement that twenty minutes slipped away quite unnoticed as they talked the project over.

Mrs. Osburn looked grave when John came back ; but she said nothing then. She did not wish to disturb his mind with reproof just as he was about to begin a lesson that would require calmness and attention.

For three quarters of an hour, or more, John ciphered and copied, — at first, without

much difficulty or interruption; but the examples gradually became longer and more complicated. He lost considerable time over the “silver tankard” question, forgetting that for gold and silver, troy weight — not avoirdupois — must be used. The shorter the time grew, the more he found that figures wouldn’t be hurried up. Arithmetic is a thing that must either be done, or left undone. There can be no slighting, or half-way work about it.

The slate was growing very blurry, with frequent rubbings out, — his brows were knit, — he shifted uneasily in his seat — and was giving frequent anxious glances at the clock, — when, just as he was about to appeal to his mother for help over a special hobble, she was summoned to the parlor to receive a visitor.

Johnnie’s time of trouble had come. Twenty minutes more, and his father would have come, to find the task he had set unfinished. Over and over again he read the question whose answer would not come right; and

over and over he calculated the figures without discovering his mistake. At last, leaning his head, that was growing every minute more tired and confused, between his hands, and resting his elbows on his knees, he gave up, and waited helplessly till he heard his mother's step upon the stairs.

"Oh, mother!" he cried, as she entered the room again, "do just look at this *awful* sum, and see if you can tell where the mistake is!"

"I really can hardly spare the time, Johnnie," replied Mrs. Osburn. "I have left a lady in the parlor who is to stay and dine with us; and I have some orders to give about the table. But let me see what it is," she added kindly, seeing him to be in real distress. "Let me look at the book. Is this it? Phineas Bailey?"

"Yes, that's it. I don't see what they pick out such names for, to make the questions harder. John Webster is plain enough; but I knew I should get into a mess with Phineas Bailey!"

"Let me see," repeated his mother, taking

the slate. “According to the book, Phineas is entitled to \$69,856.75 for his work; and you give him \$76,756.75. That’s treating an enemy generously, at least!”

“Oh, dear me, mother! Don’t laugh! It’s horrid. I shall never be ready for father when he comes!”

“Don’t you see, Johnnie, it’s *hurry* that is doing all the mischief? Hurry, and *worry* that always comes with it?”

“Yes, mother; but I *must* hurry now,” pleaded Johnnie. “Do, please, look it over. I’m so tired.”

“Why, here’s the mistake, Johnnie, at the very beginning! Eight times seven are how many?”

“Fifty-six. Six, and five to carry.”

“And eight times three?”

“Twenty-four. And five to carry, — why so it is!” exclaimed Johnnie, astonished at his own blunder. “Twenty-nine! And I’ve been saying, all the time, eight times three are twenty-seven, and five are thirty-two! Thank you, mother! I can do it now!”

His mother stood by, a minute or two, while he went through the remainder of the sum, correcting figures that were made wrong by the error at the outset; and then, when he laid down his slate-pencil to copy the example on paper, she quietly took it up and sharpened it with a knife she kept in her work-basket. He had worn the nice point quite down to a round, blunt end. Next, she brought a dampened rag, and taking up the slate, as he safely transferred the amount that was justly due to Phineas Bailey, she wiped it clean on both sides.

“I think,” said she, as she gave them back to Johnnie, “that half the trouble in doing any work is diminished, when one’s implements are all in proper order for use. I could not accomplish so much sewing in the same time, if my work-basket, by any accident, became disordered, as if all were straight and comfortable.”

John felt the comfort of the clean slate, and the sharp pencil, as he set clear, round figures for his next example; and his head

was really less confused, now that the blurr of the old work was wiped away. If he had only had a little more time !

But just as he had reduced 15 miles, 6 furlongs, 37 rods, to rods, his father's step sounded on the stairs, and he came up into the dressing-room.

He saw that John's work was not yet done, and he did not interrupt him then with questions, but quietly gave the necessary attention to his toilet, and went down-stairs. He would not interfere with the last chance.

John had hardly written out the answer, \$ 87,781.33, when the dinner-bell rang.

It was all over now ! He had his hands and face to wash, and his hair to brush ; and he must not go down late to dinner. And there was yet another example remaining to be done !

CHAPTER IX.

THE HERON SWAMP.

“No, my son,” was the grave answer, just as John had expected. “No special favor for the day in which there has been a special neglect.”

And so the brilliant scheme of the swamp expedition fell through for that afternoon.

It was rather dull and dreary. Mr. and Mrs. Osburn, and their lady visitor, went off for a drive, taking Kathie with them.

John had hastened over to Mr. Sellinger's with his ill news of postponement; but had n't even the forlorn consolation that we turn to when we say, “misery loves company.” The other boys took it much more easily than he did. They had an alternative of pleasure.

Mrs. Sellinger was to go from home this afternoon, to visit a friend with whom she

was to remain until the next day but one. Mr. Sellinger had some parish calls to make ; and as he was to go for his wife on Wednesday, preferred, if possible, that Howard and Stephen should be her escort to-day ; although he would have set aside his own convenience rather than deprive them of an especial pleasure.

They were to take an early tea, at Cross-bridge, and drive home in the evening by the light of a young moon. All very pleasant for everybody but Johnnie, whose sole anticipation was a solitary walk to the village to supply himself with slate-pencil. Well, — it does n't do for people to *ge off the track*. One failure, one omission, one delay, sets the whole plan of a day, a year, — a lifetime often, — awry. Our own disorder brings confusion into the order of things laid out for us.

“To-morrow,” Mr. Osburn had said to Johnnie, “your lesson must be the first thing. Nothing else can be allowed till that is finished. I shall wish you to write two neat pages in your copy-book. I tel’

you now, that you may be sure and have your things in readiness."

Ah, the distasteful copy-book! It was crumpled and blotted, — half written through, with very unequal care. The first page was nicest of all. Where, then, was improvement? But when he wrote that first page, he did it with a pleasure. The blue covers were bright and smooth, and the white leaves unsoiled. It was the pleasure of a *beginning*. All boys know that. But very few know the better pleasure that comes from a "continuance" in well and careful doing. The satisfaction of adding, from day to day, one's faithful *best* to what has been done before, — keeping all fair until the end.

John's glimpse of better things, in Howard's fashion of doing, had, thus far, stirred only a discontent. The leaven in its first working was only bitter.

I do not wish to make my pages trying or tedious, by dwelling on mishaps and disappointments. I am quite willing, provided only the needful lesson be got as we go on,

to pass them over as lightly as may be in my story, as children themselves do in their lives. Keenly sensitive to suffering, that their little trials may teach them all they ought to learn, they are endowed with a wonderful elasticity, lest they should be utterly crushed. A page or two in a book, — an hour or so in a day, — are really as long a worry as they can bear at once.

So, if I should n't skip the remainder of this unsatisfactory Monday afternoon, you, my little reader, probably would.

It went by and came to an end, as surely, if not as swiftly, as if its minutes had been crowded with pleasure. The sky was blue; the air was sweet; the brook was singing along under Cedar Bridge; the swallows were merry about the eaves; Jacob was “ puttering round ” comfortably in the barn and yard, and ready with his quaint answers; and so John could n't help having a tolerably good sort of time, though not the time he had planned and hoped for.

“ Well, Jacob,” was his conclusion, when

his father had returned, and he stood by at the unharnessing of Blackbird, "it is n't much matter, after all. I've got it to think of; and if I'd gone, it would have been all over. I guess we'll go to-morrow, don't you?"

"Wal, not ezackly," replied Jacob. "I guess yer'll have to take it out in 'lottin' a spell longer. I've got the lawn ter mow ter-morrer, an' I can't answer fer nex' day. That's tew fur off to cal'late on. The wust o' puttin' off things is that they most allers *keeps* gittin' put off."

With which sombre bit of philosophy John was obliged to leave the subject.

The next day the copies were written, and the lawn was mown. Wednesday was rainy. More copies, and a feeble attempt at "putting to rights;" but things were "so old" — shabby books, crumpled copies, and frameless slate, made such a sorry show when got together, that, as Johnnie said, there "wasn't much good in it!" Rather, the old evil overshadowed the good, and made it unapparent.

Thursday came, with a bright sun; the hay was shaken out of the cocks to dry, and while this was doing, John was wisely busy with his “ Greenleaf,” and his mother was carefully putting up a nice basket of dinner; for to-day, after these preliminaries were accomplished, they were actually to go, at last, and explore the Heron Swamp.

“ Did Howard tell you,” asked Stephen of John, as the three boys scrambled delightedly into the wagon, when all was ready, “ of the luck he had yesterday? He slyed off into the woods, all alone, early in the morning, and over there among the oaks under Red Hill, he found a golden-crowned thrush’s nest, with four eggs in it.”

“ Why, he did n’t tell me that! I thought it was only an oven bird’s!”

“ Oh, yes; he did find an oven bird’s. But he found a golden-crowned thrush’s, too. And a roarer caprilla’s into the bargain!” replied Stephen, a merry mischief coming into his eye.

Johnnie stared. “ A *what?*” exclaimed he, in amazement.

Whereat Howard laughed out, and Stephen, seeing he enjoyed the joke, repeated, with pompous emphasis, —

“A roarer-caprilla’s, to be sure! Did n’t you ever hear of that? What’s the use of collecting birds’ eggs, if you don’t know the scientific names?”

“Ha! ha!” shouted Howard. “Hankervish!”

Johnnie looked from one to the other in bewilderment, as if he believed they had both gone out of their wits.

Stephen lost something of his funny expression, and looked up, a little abashed, at Howard.

“Why,” said he, “is n’t that right?”

“About as near as ‘hankervish,’ was the reply.

“What *do* you mean?” asked John.

“Why,” said Howard, “in the first place, I shall have to tell you a story. When Steenie, here, was a little fellow, and had n’t learned much English, and Elsie was smaller still, she said something one day about a

‘hankish,’ which was short, with her, for ‘pocket-handkerchief.’ Steenie put on the scientific, as he was doing just now with you, and corrected her. ‘You must n’t say *hankish*, Elsie,’ said he; ‘it is n’t *hankish*, it’s *hankervish*!’ And so, at Uncle Sellinger’s, whenever anybody tries to be very wise, and makes a blunder, we sing out ‘Hankervish!’”

“Well, what is it, then?” asked Stephen, a little impatiently, not quite relishing the joke being so suddenly turned against himself.

“Aurocapillus,” replied Howard. “It’s a bird that has as many names as a Prince Royal. However, — aurocapillus, golden-crowned-thrush, or oven-bird, — there was only one nest, and I’ve got just one egg; a little white thing, with a sprinkle of brown on the big end. The nest is the great curiosity, though, for the way they hide it. We’ll walk round there some day, and have a look at it. It’s under a bank, with a roof built over it, and just a little hole at the side to go in at.”

“How far have we got to go now, Jacob?” asked Johnnie.

“Four mile, or so,” replied Jacob.

“Gracious! what a way!” cried Stephen. “I thought it was nearer. Let’s play Vegetable Conundrums. Don’t you remember, How’, those jolly ones they used to make at your house, last winter?—A tailor’s son planted his father; and what came up?”

“Planted his father! Came up!” repeated John, astonished, never having heard before of vegetable conundrums.

“Yes. I’ll tell you. Pa—Snips!”

A little too profound for Johnnie, who looked blank. —

“Here’s an easier one,” said Howard. “Plant an hour, and what comes up?”

“Thyme,” answered Stephen. “Plant tight shoes, and what comes up? Corn, of course!”

“Hee! hee! hee!” snickered Jacob from the front, who now began to comprehend the principle. Johnnie saw through it also, and roused up attentively for what might come next.

“They planted a French Republic, and what came up?”

Stephen had n’t heard this, and nobody guessed, of course.

“A crown imperial,” said Howard. “My mother made that, and we call it the Prize Conundrum.”

“Look a-here!” cried Jacob, unexpectedly.

“Guess I can try my hand at that air! Plant a South’n C’nfed’r’cy, an’ what’ll it come up? Beet!”

“Plant Jacob’s hair,” said Stephen, saucily, “and what’ll it come up?”

“Steenie!” exclaimed Howard.

“Reddish!” shouted Steenie, defiant.

Jacob, unperturbed, laughed good-humor-
edly.

“Guess ef yer plant some folks’ heads, yer might grow punkins, likely’s not,” said he, and now they all laughed.

“We’re getting rather personal,” said Howard. “Plant a dancing-school. There’ll come up — hops!”

“Plant the middle of the afternoon?”

“Four o’clock.”

“Plant the rising sun?”

“Morning-glory.”

“Plant a good jounce,” said Jacob, as the wagon gave a sudden “flump.” There’ll come a Johnnie jump-up!” Which there had, for Johnnie was nearly thrown over the back of the seat.

“Plant a cat’s tail?” asked Howard.

“Well — what?” rejoined Stephen.

“Fir!”

“Plant — let me see — plant fire, and what’ll come up?” said Stephen.

“Smoke, to be sure,” replied Howard.

“Sunthin else, tew,” said Jacob. “Ashes!”

“Plant Jacob’s felt hat,” said Johnnie, making his first essay. “What’ll come up?”

“Squash!” shouted the boys, all together, in glee.

“Plant three boys in a wagon, goin’ ter Heron Swamp, and what’ll come up? — Goose tongue, and all kinds o’ garden sass!”

Then you may well imagine there was an

explosion. Jacob's grand conundrum was like a mine of rockets let off after an exhibition of small single fireworks.

“Plant my mother's gingerbread,” says Stephen, diving under the seat into a basket, and producing a slip of the fragrant yellow cake. “Two-lips!” And he suited the action to the word.

“Four-lips!” corrected Howard, seizing a share for himself, while Johnnie, leaning back, held out his hand, and cried out, —

“Six-lips!”

Not very brilliant joking, perhaps; but jokes and gingerbread had pungency enough between them, and to merry-hearted, hungry boys, it little mattered which furnished most.

Jacob said nothing about *his* lips, but they were not omitted in the distribution.

Down a hill, — round a curve, — into a hollow, where the road stretched on, straight before them for more than a mile, dark with the close growth of trees and underbrush on either side, — rank with a wild, damp, earthy smell, wherein the flavor of old pine stumps

was largely mingled, yet now and then blessedly overcome, when a sudden breath of wind swept by, that had paused on its way, where the wild honeysuckles blossomed, — this was the Swamp.

They drove on till they could look back and forward, either way, without seeing anything but the long, straight road, hemmed in with gloom, and running off toward the sunlight; and then they turned aside among the trees, and fastening the horse behind a clump of birches, set off, stoutly and cheerily, on their tramp into the depths.

Jacob produced a little hatchet from the wagon, and with this, and his big jack-knife, cut and prepared for each of the boys a long, tough, oak stick, before they started.

The walking was easy for a little way, impeded only by the underbrush and vines; but by-and-by the soil grew rapidly more marshy and wet, and they were obliged to spring from tussock to stump, and from stump to tussock. Then their long sticks were of great service as leaping-poles.

Farther and farther they penetrated the weird gloom of the Swamp. Closer and ranker grew the smell of paludal vegetation; of the decaying woods, and all the debris of growth and death, that time and winds had scattered in the wild and secret recesses of the place. Bodies of animals lay here and there, sending forth a horrible effluvium to the infrequent passer-by. Twice they came within sight of the huge carcass of a horse, that had, perhaps, been driven there and slain, or had wandered in and died.

On they scrambled and leaped and stumbled. Over the tangled roots, from stump to stump, above darkly shining waters, — a wearisome and awesome way; sometimes round about, where was a boggy interval too wide to leap, until they found a pathway over some fallen log; and again, springing, with the help of Jacob's long and stalwart arm, where their leaping-staves, alone, could not carry them.

"Don't you smell something horribly

fishy?" asked Stephen, as a new odor assailed his unaccustomed nostrils.

"I smell everything, I think," answered Howard. "Why yes," he added, "I do, certainly, get, just here, 'an ancient and fish-like smell.' What can it be?"

"Why, *fish*, of course," replied Jacob. "We're comin' pooty nigh naow, ter the herons' head-quarters. Yer see, they hav a middlin' long stretch of it, from here ter the river, after their provender; an' there's one thing that's pesky queer 'baout them air birds. Ef they happen, anyhow, — gaapin' or so, — to drop a fish, flyin' over, they never come daown to look for it, but jest let it lay, an' go straight back ter where they got it, fer more. I donno whuther it's cause they 're tew pesky praoud t' own up their kerlessness, or whuther they 're sech fools that they dunno haow ter mend th' matter. A little o' both, mebbe; same's 'tis with folks."

"Hark! what's that?" cried Johnnie, suddenly, whose nerves were strung to an easily startled pitch by this time, through the strange

aspects and odors, and the unearthly stillness and solitude with which they had been surrounded.

“Quawk! quawk!” sounded harshly in the air over their heads; and great, dark birds flapped heavily over the tops of the trees.

Suddenly down dropped a small fish — a river-herring — right before them, into one of the little, dusky pools that gleamed, here and there, among the roots and sods.

“Quawk! quawk!” reverberated again, in still more strident tones, as the dispossessed heron soared up higher, making a restless circuit in the air, and then swooped off, again, in the direction whence he had come a moment before.

“There! that air feller’s jest gone an’ done it!” exclaimed Jacob. “Seein’ ’s believin’, sure enough.”

A little farther on, and they heard more and more constantly the flapping of the great, brown wings.

“Herecabaouts is where they collernize,”

said Jacob, looking up at the stems of the tall old pines they came out among, at last, in a drier sort of soil that seemed like an island in the surrounding morass. The tall trunks were whitened with the excrements of the birds that had held their undisturbed possession for nobody knows how many years. High up, against the rough, stained sides, were built their nests, of twigs, set semi-circularly against the trees, like wall-baskets.

A strange settlement it was, and of strange inhabitants. The boys felt as if they had got into some wild, fabulous place, such as Sinbad the Sailor visited in his search after the Roc's egg; and they looked up and around, in a sort of indefinite expectation of wonders that might yet reveal themselves.

"Naow!" said Jacob, "there's a job fer yer! Shin up, an' help yerselves!"

It was by no means to be done in a minute, however; neither was it, in any way, a very inviting undertaking. They waited awhile, resting and considering.

"Well, we're in for it!" said Howard, at

last. “ And we won’t go home without the eggs ! ”

“ That’s real Yankee grit ! ” said Jacob, approvingly. “ That’s the way to take Richmond ! Thunder an’ guns ! I wish my old gran’sir’ was alive, jest ter show folks naow-a-day, laow ter dew things ! He never walked round and raound a job ; he jest went at it with both fists. Up there, ’t Pol-lardsville general trainin’, he gin ’em a lesson once, ’t I guess folks han’t forgot yit ! ”

“ Tell us all about it, Jacob ! ” exclaimed John, who had more than once been entertained with the like reminiscences. And as he spoke he settled himself comfortably on a pine stump, to listen.

“ Yes, let’s have it,” joined in the other boys, making a like disposal of themselves.

“ Wal,” returned Jacob, modestly ; “ I don’t set up ter be no gret hand at a story ; but seein’ the congregation’s all set’n ready, ’spose I must let yer hev it somehow.

“ Yer see, ther’ was a grand muster o’ all the milishy raound ; and my gran’sir’, he was

Cap'n of a comp'ny. Th' Gov'nor, he was there, an' all the big folks; an' they trained 'em raound, 'n' revooed 'em, pooty much all day; an' then, towards evenin', they hed a sham-fight. They hed a hull brigade on the field, an' folks said, as seen it, that the manooovers was wonderful. Anyhaow, *one* on 'em must ha' ben sunthin a leetle remarkable.

“Yer see, my gran'sir' was posted with his men, way daown o' one side o' the field, an' fer some time he did n't hev much ter dew with the ginerall goins on; an' by the time his orders come, he was gittin' a leetle mite res'less. Fin'lly the Cunnel's orderly come ridin' up, an' gin the word, ‘Forrud!’ march!’ An' march they did! ‘T was gittin' duskish, an' somehow or nuther, arter th' word was gin aout, they did n't remember ter 'tend ter that pertickler set o' men, fer a pooty consider'ble spell. My gran'sir' marched on, 'cordin' t' orders, 'cross the trainin'-field, an' over a wall, an' straight thro' a cornfield, till they fetched up, fer a minute, 'longside o'

old Simon Spanker's barn; a tumble daown old thing, jest ready ter go to pieces. My gran'sir' would n't give in. He'd been ordered ter *march*, an' he war n't the man ter halt till th' orders come. 'Daown with the barn, men!' says he. An', fact, them fellers pitched in with a good will; an' in ten minutes they'd laid the sides flat, an' marched over 'em! An' twar n't till the thing was nigh 'baout done, that the officers waked up, an' sent 'em word ter halt. It's my belief, ef they hed n't he'd ha' marched to the North Pole, afore he'd ha' stopped!"

Peals of laughter from the boys, at the story itself, and Jacob's peculiar style of narration, echoed among the old trees, and startled the herons from their high perches.

"We may as well go to work," said Howard, rising from his temporary seat, and measuring, with an upward look, the nearest trees.

"Let's each choose one," said Stephen, "and see who'll shin it first, and find the most."

"So I say," assented Johnnie, who was

eagerly awaiting the chance to exhibit his newly-acquired accomplishment, the result of most persistent daily practice among the cedars of the High Pasture; to the extensive detriment of his clothing, and sometimes of less absolutely extrinsic integument.

“Very well,” said Howard. “I’ll take this.” And he laid his hand against the rough, encrusted bark of a tree, some thirty feet from whose base was built one of the singular nests, whose outside promised so little, but within which lay, as they believed, such treasures of exquisite perfection.

Above their heads, among the tall, rustling tops of the pines, swooped and flapped uneasily the disturbed herons, little wonted to such invasion of their fastness; uttering almost incessantly the harsh “quawk, quawk,” as they went and came, or circled restlessly and suspiciously about.

“And I’ll have this,” said Stephen, taking his stand at the foot of another tree near by, which gave equal promise of reward for the labor of climbing.

“Here’s a bigger nest than either,” shouted Johnnie, “and not so far up. I don’t care for that, though; I can shin as well as anybody, now!”

“Here, Jacob!” called out Stephen. “Give us a start, will you? These trees are a pretty good armful, here at the bottom.”

Jacob came over, and gave them the desired assistance, and very effectually; beginning with John, as the youngest and least experienced, though the latter rather scouted the favor.

Standing close under the tree, he first lifted the boy to his shoulders, and then, as he climbed upward, gave him a vigorous boost, by legs and feet, till he got quite beyond the reach of a helping hand. In like manner, he successively and quickly aided the other two; and now came the great scramble.

Stephen was the most expert, and Howard had the greatest length of limb; but Johnnie had less distance to climb, and, moreover, got the first “boost.” So it ended in his

reaching the goal just an instant before the others, who came up almost together. All three plunged their hands eagerly into the nests.

“That’s what I call comin’ pretty well up to the scratch!” called out Jacob, from below. “Look out, naow, an’ don’t break yer bones comin’ daown! Got anything?”

“Yes, plenty!” said Howard, in reply.

“Only one here,” said Stephen, who had hoisted himself comfortably across a strong branch that started from the tree, just under the protuberance of sticks and straws that formed the clumsy, one-sided heron’s nest.

“I suppose the bird ’ll lay more. Anyhow, I’ve got it. How shall I get it down?”

“Put it in your mouth, as I did mine,” answered Howard, who had rapidly accomplished his descent, and now removed the great egg from between his distended lips, that he might reply.

John, meanwhile, was coming down his tree, carefully, without a word.

“Mine was a great nest, three times as big

as Steenie's," said he, as he touched *terra firma* and looked round ruefully, " and not a plaguey thing in it ! "

" That 's a pesky shame," said Jacob, sympathetically. " Come ter look agin, I ought to ha' known better than ter start yer up that air tree. It's an old nest, by the size on 't. An' that 's another cur'ous thing abaout them birds. They never build the hull house till they see haow big a fam'ly they 've got ; and then they just put on an addition front 'nough ter 'commerdate, an' pull away the fust wall when the second 's finished."

The heads of the three boys were clustered together over the heron's eggs.

" I thought it was strange," said Stephen, " that such big birds could grow up in such little nests ; but I never should have guessed such a funny thing as their piecing out the house after the young ones were hatched. Are n't the eggs splendid, though ? " he added, ecstatically.

" Won't they look superb in the black walnut sawdust ? " said Howard.

“ Oh, dear ! ” exclaimed John, uneasily ;
“ I hope I shall get one ! ”

“ Of course you will,” replied Howard.
“ There’s no end of nests round here. You don’t suppose we’re going home with one apiece ! Isn’t it queer, though, to come through such a pokerish place, and among all sorts of filthiness, to get such beautiful things ? ”

Meanwhile, Jacob had been quietly exploring a little farther on. He stood now, with his hatchet in his hand, at the foot of a tall dead trunk of monstrous girth, that had, years since, apparently been scathed by lightning, and now stood, nearly divested of branches — huge and bare — except where, high above, it was covered with a bas-relief of clustered nests, not adjoining, but in close proximity to each other.

“ Here you are ! ” shouted Jacob. “ A reg’lar fam’ly settlement ! It’s your chance, Johnnie ! Come along ! ” And so saying, he uplifted his hatchet and struck a smart blow into the side, about two feet or so from the ground.

“Why, Jacob! What are you going to do?” exclaimed John. “Cut down the tree? I should think that was a queer way to get eggs!”

“So should I,” returned Jacob, quietly. “But, yer see, there’s more’n one way ter kill a cat, besides chokin’ her ter death with butter!” And, as he spoke, he aimed his hatchet higher, and with a couple more strokes made a second deep notch at a similar distance, further up.

“Ah, ha!” cried Howard. “I see it now! You’re a brick, Jacob!”

Resting his feet, successively, in the notches thus made, Jacob clasped the stem of the tree with one arm, and using the hatchet with the other, cut a third step for the ascent; and so on, till his head came on a level with the group of nests.

“Four on ’em! An’ eggs in every one! Sho-o!” shouted Jacob, as a pair of the domiciliary proprietors, who had been frightened away by the first onslaught on the foundations of their homestead, came heavily flut-

tering near. "How many 'll yer hev, Johnnie?"

"Four!" John shouted back, in high excitement.

"How 'll I git 'em daown?" called Jacob. "I can't take 'em all in my mouth, ter once; an' they would n't stan' no kind o' chance in my trousis pockets!"

"Here! catch my cap!" cried Howard, tossing it up as he spoke. "Put 'em in that, and double it up, and hold it between your teeth!"

"So I can, fact!" replied Jacob, as he deposited an egg from each nest in the crown of the cap. "Two heads is better'n one; 'specially when a cap's flung into the bargain!"

And in a minute more, the cap, with its treasure, was safe in Johnnie's hands.

Now he was really rich! Four great, beautiful, light-green herons' eggs! Now he could make his own bargains for duplicates!

"Joe Simmons has got some owls' eggs," said he. "I 'll get one of them from him."

“ And some of those Academy boys have been down to Long Cove, and brought back any quantity of terns’ eggs,” said Stephen. “ Joe told me so yesterday. We ’il all have some of them. He ’ll make a trade for us. I don’t believe anybody knows of this place.”

“ Who ’s for another climb ? ” asked Howard.

“ I,” — “ I,” shouted the others.

And so, in utter disregard of soil or scratch, habited as they were for the excursion, in their otherwise discarded clothes, they climbed tree after tree, and brought down almost more spoil than they could comfortably carry away.

“ Now, let ’s start for the wagon, — ’count o’ gittin’ there, as Jacob says,” — suggested Stephen, when they had numbered, among them, sixteen splendid eggs, successfully blown, beside half-a-dozen or more that were either cracked in the process, or contained young too far grown to be ejected. “ I ’m getting hungry. And we ’ve got all that awful swamp to travel over again.”

“ And all those horrid things to smell ! F—f ! ” exclaimed Johnnie.

“ It ’s just like a fairy tale,” said Stephen.
“ Going through all sorts of fearful things to get a talisman.”

“ Or crossing the Styx into the Elysian Fields,” said classical Howard.

“ Wal,” said Jacob, “ sticks and stones, and slosh, and what not, it ’s got to be did, an’ we might as well set about it ! ”

Before setting off, they gathered handfuls of dry grass and pine-leaves, and, depositing their egg-shells carefully among them, that they might not jostle together, they tied the whole mass in Jacob’s great pocket-handkerchief, which he volunteered to take into his own custody, and insure for the journey.

This done, they were ready to attempt the Slough of Despond again.

Somehow, it did not seem so long in going back, as it had in coming. Distances hardly ever do.

Just before they emerged from the Swamp to the dryer ground about its border, Stephen,

as he was setting his foot upon a tussock of grass, was startled and surprised by the sudden rushing out from the long sedge, of a little creature whose motions were so darting and swift, that he could hardly tell what sort of animal it was.

“See there, Howard!” he called out, standing still upon the stump where he happened to be, — “what’s that running away, there?”

Threading in and out, between the sedgy hummocks, it hurried nimbly and shyly along, until it suddenly seemed to dive under one, and went out of sight.

“It’s a swamp-sparrow!” cried Howard. “Where did it come from?”

“Right here,” answered Stephen, pointing to the tuft of grass before him.

“There must be a nest there,” said Howard, and carefully parting the long, rank herbage, he uncovered a little ground nest, with five eggs. They were of a very pale blue, nearly white, liberally splashed with brown.

“What a find!” exclaimed Stephen, in delight. “Whose are they? Yours or mine?”

“Yours, to be sure. You started the bird.”

“But I did n’t know what it was, when I had started it,” said Stephen, honestly. “It looked as much like a mouse, as anything. And I should n’t have thought of finding a bird’s nest here.”

“Well, it is found,” replied Howard. “And you’re the Columbus. Pick out your egg, and come along. I had got entirely past the place when you called me to turn round.”

So Stephen took one of the little tarnished-looking things, and stepped cautiously on, around the spot, leaving the rest unharmed.

The boys made a capital dinner, when the baskets were opened on their return to the wagon, accompanied with drinks of clear, cool water, which they dipped up from a

little run that found its way down along the edge of the swamp, from some hidden spring in the woods above.

Then they laid their bundle of eggs in an emptied basket, and set off, homeward, in great glee at the success of their expedition. They were hilarious over their "loot," as Howard called it, and talked over magnificent plans for exchanges.

"Only look out," said Howard, as Stephen was enthusiastically enumerating the duplicates of rare eggs that he knew to be in the possession of one and another boy, who would be glad to "swap" them for herons' — "look out you don't do as the milkmaid did in the primer, when her green gown came to grief before she got it. You'll have your foot in the basket, in a few more flourishes of that sort."

"No I won't! —

'Egg-collector, careful
Of the precious casket,
Knowing eggs are eggs,
Tightly holds his basket' !"

sang Stephen, modifying Saxe's rhyme, and lifting the precious freight to his knee.

"I don't want," said Jacob, deliberately, as the boys jumped, at last, from the wagon, in Mr. Osburn's yard, "to be puttin' tew many notions in yer heads ter once; but what 'ud yer say, naow, some day afore long, to a kingfisher's nest?"

"A kingfisher's nest!" shouted the three, in a breath. "Do you really know of one, Jacob?"

"Wal, no, I don't, — for sartin; but I see one fly over ter-day, when we was in the Swamp, and I feel kinder innardly persuaded where he must ha' come from!"

"Well," said Johnnie, with the calmness of an absolute certainty, "if you do, it's as good as anybody else seeing the nest. I'll ask my father to let us go."

CHAPTER X.

KINGFISHERS.

HOWARD'S box came home from the cabinet-maker's. It was a very beautiful thing for the purpose. The soft, rich, dark color of the wood, — the little square spaces for the eggs, carefully bedded with fine, even dust of the same — the neatness and compactness of the whole, to the nicely-fitting cover, and the small lock and key ; these the boys looked at with eager and delighted — two of them with half envious — eyes. But, as I have said before, elegant as the arrangement was, it seemed only “ exactly like Howard ;” just in keeping with everything else belonging to him.

He handled his beautiful specimens with the delicacy of touch that a lady might use in assorting her jewels ; and no pearls or

diamonds were ever laid into their velvet cases with the genuine satisfaction that Howard felt in arranging in their order these trophies of his, that he had wrested, with an energy and enterprise that repudiated all suspicion of effeminacy, from swamp and hillside and forest.

Joel Simmons, the farmer's son, was their pilot on the expedition after the kingfisher's nest. Haying came on, and Jacob was too busy. But Joel knew all the wild haunts, far and near; and a hint from Jacob of "them air steep sand-banks, where the river runs through, beyond Chestnut Ridge," was quite sufficient for him.

The only difficulty was, here were four boys, all egg-collectors, and all equally eager for the fun of the undertaking; and they could not hope to find more than one kingfisher's nest. Whose should the egg be?

It became a bargain of duplicates. By this time, by daily searching, and much good luck, the boys had greatly added to their stores of wood-birds' eggs, to say nothing

of other varieties obtained by trading; and they first bought off Joel Simmons' claim, and rewarded his services as a guide, by contributing each something that he had not yet procured.

Stephen offered him his choice between a crow and a tern; Howard bestowed a rarer yet, a humming-bird's egg, of which he had two, that had been given him by his friends in Rhinebeck. John added a pigeon-woodpecker, and a titmouse. Now it only remained for these three to bargain among themselves, or to draw lots for the prize.

"I don't see the use of bein' so partickler," remarked Joe, while the matter was under discussion, "about takin' an egg or two, more or less. Besides, you can't dig into a kingfisher's nest, without pretty much breakin' it up."

"But Jacob says," said Stephen, "that that don't make any difference. They'll come back to the nest, whether or no."

"Well," put in Johnnie, "you know, How', you're to go by your own judgment

in taking the eggs. Perhaps we'll find such a lot, that we can each have one, as well as not."

"They don't lay more than six, according to Nuttall," said Howard.

"Well, I'm satisfied, you know, for one," said Joe; "and I should think if you went halves with the birds, it would be fair enough."

"Break into a man's house," exclaimed Howard, "and go halves with him for his silver spoons!"

The wood-path that took them over Chestnut Ridge, struck in toward a ledge of rocks from the roadside, where the thoroughfare stretched for a mile or more along a flat surface, bordered on either hand by a low, young growth of birch and maple, over whose green tops one could look away, unobstructed, as over a green heaving sea, to the bald escarpment that reared up, westwardly, its precipitous face. Toward this they turned, and over this — how, they

could scarcely guess, except that Joe Simmons knew a way — they were to go, through the deep wood, to the river.

“My father says,” said Joe, as they approached the wonderful, upheaved mass of stone, crested with the magnificent forest, but revealing, here and there, the quality of its foundation, “that there’s jest as good granite here, if folks would work the ledge, as there is in the Quincy Hills. I s’pose there’s lots of things in the world, that folks haven’t found out.”

“Kingfishers’ nests, and all,” said John; not prospecting for granite, but intent on his own especial object.

By the time they entered the woods, up the steep, zigzag path that wound from point to point along the ledge, they had left a long way behind them the road that was so busily travelled, short as the interval had seemed to them, when they had only measured with the eye its unbroken extent.

It was no mere strip of woodland they came into now, bounded by turnpikes, or

cut up by railway; where the teamster's halloo, or the rumble and shriek of the locomotive would break in upon, and destroy the illusions of deep stillness. It was truly a bit of "forest primeval;" overlying the boundary between two straggling country towns, and stretching miles up and down along the river; so that where the watercourse thus broke through, in one of its most beautiful reaches, the woods were only interrupted to begin again upon the farther side, and thence they might have walked on and on, in the hush of its green glooms, till they should come suddenly out on the wild and beautiful banks of Pontaug.

John was growing fast, in this great, free country life. He had felt and seemed like quite a little boy, a short time ago, in the city, where he knew the way only about a few sidewalks, and up and down the avenues of the Common. There was a part of him that did not get fed, except meagrely, in his picture and story books; and now this puny, starveling imagination, these cramped per-

ceptions, were starting suddenly forth into the life that was made for them, among rich and abounding realities. Rivers and hills, and forests and lakes, would be something more to him, now, in the mental image he was getting of them, than mere blurs and blots and zigzags on a bit of paper. The old, stereotyped phrase, even, — “the face of the country is diversified,” — would be able, at last, to suggest a rational idea, instead of remaining forever a weary, wornout form of words. Johnnie didn’t know it, but his morning sums were, perhaps, the least part of the education he was getting now. His other and wider “Exercises in Green-leaf,” were doing him quite as much good.

For a long way their path was constant climbing, — not very steep, to be sure, except at the first, — but every rock and root and gully made a step up, for them, and never a descent. Now and then, they sat down for a rest, and took breath, and listened. Happy and eager as they were in

their enterprise, they were rather subdued in their enjoyment at these moments. Even boys, I think, are hardly ever *frolicsome* in a deep wood. They sat still, drinking in that bountiful air, fragrant with all sorts of wonderful distillations of earth and tree and herb; and listening to the music of scores of little invisible brooks and waterfalls, that called out to each other from their separate solitudes, like human lives that give out a melody to each other as they go on, each its own way, to the great deep where all are by-and-by to meet together.

Up they came, at last, to the summit of the Ridge, but between the openings of the trees they could look here and there either way, and get a peep at the great landscapes that lay below. Little gleams of the river shone out in the distance on the side whither they were going; and on the other stretched the woods and pastures to where they got just a glimpse of the high road, like a chalk-like on a green carpet.

“Do you want me to take you up to the

top of the Dome?” asked Joel Simmons. “It’s just the biggest look-out that ever was.”

“A Dome? Up here in the woods?” asked Johnnie, who had been brought up in the shadow of the great dome of the State-House, and knew no other. He had heard of St. Paul’s and St. Peter’s indeed, but they were across the Atlantic.

“Yes, we’ve got a Dome. Why not?” replied Joe. “Been built longer, too, than any church-steeple. Didn’t you see it, when we came across the White Birch Lot?”

“I saw a great round rock, on the top of the Ridge, to be sure,” answered Howard. “Is that it?”

“Yes, that’s the Dome. And for all it looks so smooth and slopin’, there’s a first-rate comfortable way to get up to the top of it.”

“Sha’n’t we tumble off?” asked John, to whom the idea of scaling a great round rock was as if it had been the veritable State-House Dome itself.

“Oh, no! It’s broad enough when you

get on to it," replied Joe. "I'll take you right up the back-stairs, as easy as anything."

Turning to the left, as he spoke, he led them along the summit of the Ridge until they came to the side of the Dome opposite to that which rose so round and smooth to the view from the White Birch Lot.

Here, it rested comfortably against a natural bolster of earth behind, which so banked it up, that the height to be scaled was materially lessened. Besides, partly by accident, and partly by art, a sort of loose, scrambling causeway of small stones was here heaped up, which Joe designated as the "back-stairs." After ascending this, they found themselves upon a rib, or groove of the rock, which broke its smoothness, and which led them around and up, safely, to the very top.

There was plenty of room, round as the Dome had appeared from below; even John no longer thought of sliding off.

And what a glorious panorama they saw thence!

The windings of the river, — the patchwork of the fields, with their different tints of growing harvest, — the roads and hedges, that checked the landscape with their lines of drab and green, — and, above all, the great sky-full of blue beauty that overhung and embraced the whole, and in the midst of whose breathing stillness they seemed to stand !

They looked on it all silently. Boy-nature was held in check for a space, while something deeper asserted itself. Something that rose, heaving, in the bosom, looked out earnestly from grave eyes, — and at last, too great to be contained, exhaled itself, spirit-like, in a long, sighing breath.

Boy-life awoke again.

“ I say,” said Stephen, coming first to himself, “ I think we’ve found the Roc’s egg ! ”

“ I wonder,” said Howard, whose moderate knowledge of geology gave him an interest beyond that of the others, “ where ever this great boulder came from ? ”

“It’s been here always!” replied Joe, surprised at such a question. “As long as the Ridge has!”

“Well, I suppose *that* hasn’t been here always,” returned Howard. “There don’t seem to be any ‘forever’ outside of the Bible. They say in the geologies, that the world has been turned upside down, and inside out, nobody knows how many times. And these great rocks, that are lodged this way on the tops of the hills, they say were brought along and left by some tremendous flood that came down, ages ago, from the North Pole.”

“P'r'aps,” answered Joe. “But folks say a great many things that they a'n't sure of.”

Howard laughed, and did not resume his lecture. And after one more silent look, the boys came down, as we all have to do, from their grand height, and its glorious glimpses, to attend again to their own little especial and personal business of the day.

Down the Ridge, toward the river, was another scramble. At its foot, a level space

intervened, covered with young trees and underbrush, and then they came out upon the high, sandy bank, that overlooked the stream.

"We shall have to get down, somehow," said Joe. "If there's a kingfisher's nest anywhere, it'll be right in the face of the bank, and we can't see it from here."

So they walked along until they came to a more gradual slope, and found a gravelly gully, by which they could descend to the bed of the river.

"It don't seem," said Stephen, as they stood in the deep ravine, where nothing stirred but themselves and the leaping river, "as if this same water, a little way down, would get among all those great mill-wheels, and have to go to work!"

A grown man might have looked at the careless boys, intent only upon present pleasure, and have thought something of the same sort.

"I see a hole in the bank, up there!" exclaimed Johnnie. "Do you suppose that's it?"

“Yes, to be sure!” cried Joe and Howard, at the same moment, as they caught sight of it also.

“And now,” continued the former, “we’ve got to go back again the way we came. It’s nearer the top than the bottom.”

“I’ll stay here,” said Stephen, “and tell you when you get to the place.”

So the other three went back, and scrambled up the gully again, and walked thence along the edge of the bank, till they came to the point opposite to where Stephen remained standing below.

“There it is!” shouted the latter. “You’re right over it now!” and he hurried up after them.

Just where they stood, above the orifice, the shelving bank projected, the sandy soil having fallen away from under it. Below the nest, it sloped out at an angle that would give them a comfortable foothold, if once they reached it. This they accomplished by proceeding along the edge of the bank, until they came to a place where they

could more easily begin their descent, and then upon their hands and feet, they backed themselves down. The uncertain soil kept slipping away from under them, and their horizontal progress along toward the nest was more difficult even than the descent had been. But slipping and scrambling and clinging, they got there.

The entrance hole was small, just big enough to introduce an arm.

Joel did so.

“It’s a good deep one,” said he, “I can’t reach the bottom. We’ll have to dig.”

So, with eager hands, the boys fell to work, enlarging the opening, and reaching in to scrape out handfuls of the loose earth at the sides.

Presently, an angry, rattling cry made itself heard above their heads. Looking up, they saw — perched on a fallen log that projected over the bank, a few feet down the stream — the “head of the family,” the male kingfisher, making very vehement gestures of disapproval and indignation.

His crest of close feathers was raised excitedly from his head, like a straight, stiff growth of hair brushed up from a man's forehead; and his short, turned-up tail jerked and vibrated angrily.

At the same moment, almost, all four of the boys started back suddenly, as an answering cry came from within the nest, and the female bird fluttered through her despoiled entrance-hall, and soaring over their heads, dropped down, beyond, as if wounded, upon the water.

"Yes — marm!" cried Joe. "You're very cunning! But it is n't *you* we want!"

And knowing now that the coast was clear, the house-breakers redoubled their endeavors.

After about ten minutes of vigorous labor, they had excavated a passage of sufficient size for a small boy to crawl into.

"Now, Johnnie!" said Stephen. "You're the smallest. Go ahead!"

And, head first, in went Johnnie, at the hole. Presently, all of him had disappeared,

except his feet. Then, for a minute, he was stationary; and then his legs, with very convulsive movements, gradually emerged; and then, working backward upon his elbows, he came forth, bearing a beautiful white egg, safely, in either hand.

“Two!” exclaimed Howard.

“Yes,” answered John. “I had to use *my* judgment, this time. I could n’t holler back for orders with my head in that sand-hole!”

“How many were there?” asked Stephen.

“Six, as near as I could tell. Shall I go back and get another?”

“No,” answered Howard. “I think we’ve taken all we ought; and besides, it’s a little too tough a job for you to try again, spunky as you are! One of ’em’s yours, by all rights. You saw the nest first; and you ‘went in and won.’ So Steenie and I’ll draw lots for the other.”

They made the best of their way back to the bank again, sat down and took breath;

and then, with two spires of grass, held in Joel Simmons's hand, Howard and Stephen drew lots for the egg.

It fell to Stephen.

Howard couldn't help looking a little disappointed, quietly as he acquiesced in the decision. He had wished very much for one of these rare eggs.

"I'll tell you," said Johnnie, "I don't care so much for rare ones, as I do to have a good many. Mine don't make much show, yet. If you'll give me a rusty blackbird and a wood-thrush, you shall have the kingfisher. Besides, I can get another next year, now I know where to come for it.

And so it was settled; only Howard generously threw a beautiful, light green egg of the black-billed cuckoo into the bargain.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GREEN BOX.

ONE morning, in the beginning of August, John awoke early, and lay watching, by the dim light that came in through closed blinds and partly drawn curtains, the constellations of flies upon the white ceiling of his room.

His father, the evening before, had been showing him in the heavens, the Great Bear, the Northern Crown, the Swan, the Dolphin, and the Harp.

Johnnie was trying to make out some resemblances to these in the little, accidental groups of black dots above his head.

But his dark stars were restless. Just as one fly crawled exactly into the right place to finish the tail of the Great Bear, the two Pointers flew away.

By-and-by he gave it up, and turning his

cheek round upon his pillow, lay comfortably considering his plans for the day.

Looking forward through the archway of his room, he happened to see, through the half-opened door of the wardrobe, his box of birds' eggs.

"I *must* have a bigger box, somehow," he said to himself. "There isn't any fun in keeping them all heaped together, that way. I've a good mind to put them in one of the drawers in the wardrobe. Only then I could n't take them out very well to show to anybody. Besides, Jane would be stuffing all sorts of things right in on top of 'em. People never seem to think it's any matter where they put my things when they pick them up. I wonder if mother has n't got some sort of a big box that I could have."

And suddenly, at this point, there flashed into his head a bright idea, the germ of a very excellent plan for fitting up something that should in some degree resemble the elaborate arrangement of Howard Sellinger.

"If she'll only give it to me!" he ejacu-

lated aloud. "Oh, dear, I *hope* she won't be too busy to see about it!"

After breakfast, he came to his mother, very anxiously, with his request. She *was* going to be very busy; but when she looked round at him, and saw the great longing in his eyes, she put aside her own thoughts for the moment, and gave her full consideration to what he asked.

There was a certain very handsome paste-board box, — large and stout and strong, — in which Mrs. Osburn had had a cloak sent home the winter before. It was standing now upon the top of a bureau, in one of the spare chambers, and had some laces and ribbons in it. The outside was covered with a dark-green watered paper; and inside it was lined smoothly, with one of a soft and delicate shade of brown.

This he asked for, — as "a very great favor, indeed, mother!"

"I think so!" said Mrs. Osburn. "What shall I do with my ribbons and laces? And what can you possibly do with the box?"

"I can divide it all off into compartments, for my eggs. I've thought it all out, mother, and I *know* I can do it."

"I'm afraid you would only spoil the box, and then we should both be badly off."

"No, I won't. You know I'm a real good carpenter."

"But carpenters don't work in paste-board."

"Oh, there's got to be some wood-work about it, too. Any way, it's all the same. I've got a plan, only you wouldn't understand it; and besides, I suppose you can't stop."

His mother laughed.

"Perhaps I might be too stupid at understanding your description; and I can't very well stop now, to be sure. I've some pickles to make, and I shall be in the kitchen for an hour or two. After that, I'll see about it. But mind,—I don't, by any means, promise."

"Oh, mother!" pleaded Johnnie, "I wish you could tell me now; I could do ever so much in an hour or two."

“You may do this,” said Mrs. Osburn, “if you are willing to work upon a chance. You may collect your materials, and make whatever beginning you can, without the box; and then, bring all to me, when I am at leisure, and if I see a probability of success, I will give it to you. Perhaps, too, I may be able to help you with my advice, — after I am once brought to comprehend the matter,” she added, smiling.

“Oh, that’ll do; thank you!” replied John, very heartily.

Mrs. Osburn went into the kitchen, and Johnnie ran off to the barn.

It was “real vacation time,” now, as he said; so for a week or two there had been no “Greenleaf” to do. He was to begin his lessons soon again, however, doing a little, daily, for the few weeks before the Academy should open, lest the examination should take him at a disadvantage.

At about ten o’clock, Mrs. Osburn went up-stairs to her own room, took off her white apron that she had worn in the kitchen,

smoothed a little the soft, glossy folds of her hair, and sat down in her low sewing-chair, beside the little workstand in the window.

Just as she had done this, John made his appearance, with a basket, containing tools and materials; and taking his place on a cushion at his mother's feet, and setting the things beside him on the floor, began, forthwith, to expound.

"You see, mother, I've got out these slips of wood, all just alike; and I guess they're just the right length, for I went up-stairs and measured the box. I did n't touch it, though. I'm going to set them lengthways"——

"Lengthwise," corrected his mother.

—— "lengthwise, through the box, and fasten them at each end with one of those tiny little tacks you've got. And then I must have some pasteboard, and cut it in little pieces, and fasten them in between to check off the squares. Don't you see?"

"Oh, yes, I see. But do it neatly, you must have patience, and not be too eager to finish."

“Oh, no, I won’t,” said John, “I mean to have a box every bit as good as Howard Sellinger’s.”

“I think I know of something I can do to help you, already,” said Mrs. Osburn, entering with real interest into the scheme. “But first, I’ll bring the box.”

And she went across the hall into the opposite chamber, and laying her bits of finery nicely away into a drawer, brought back the emptied box to the delighted Johnnie.

“Don’t you think it would be a pity to put those unpainted pine sticks against this beautiful light brown lining?” she asked.

“Why, — yes,” — answered John, hesitating. “Only I hav’n’t got anything better to put in. What could I have?”

“I might cover them nicely for you, with paper, to match.”

“Oh, how jolly! Could you? But you hav’n’t got any paper have you?”

Mrs. Osburn went to her closet, and took from a shelf a roll, which she opened and showed to John. It was some that had

been left after the drawing-room was papered. It was of a lovely, light-brown color, with stripes of a darker shade. The ground tint was almost precisely a match for the lining of the box.

“Would n’t that do?” she asked.

“Of course it would,” said Johnnie, gleefully. “Mother! you’re a brick!”

“Rather a knock-down compliment,” said Mrs. Osburn. “And I can’t make out what it implies, exactly; unless that I am dull and ugly and coarse and hard. Is that it? Or what is a brick, humanly speaking?”

“It isn’t that! I don’t know as there’s any definition to it. It’s just a *brick*, — and that’s all.

“Something useful and substantial, maybe.”

“Yes, — and something you could n’t have any decent kind of a house without,” cried Johnnie, triumphantly.

“Now, John,” resumed Mrs. Osburn, after she had laughed merrily at this sally, — “I find these light stripes are just the right

width for doubling over your slips of wood. Can you cut them out neatly for me, while I do the gumming?”

John readily undertook this part of the task, and went busily to work with the scissors, while his mother, with a brush and a bottle of mucilage, pasted each one carefully, and smoothed it nicely over a slip of wood; first measuring the latter accurately, and shaving the ends, as required, to fit neatly into the box. In about half an hour, all were ready, and set up on their edges in the broad window-seat, to dry.

Then, like the good householder, from her treasures of new and old, she produced the next thing needed,—a couple of sheets of strong, stiff pasteboard. These she cut into lengths corresponding with the width of the box, and went on to cover them, in like manner as the others, with the colored paper.

“But, mother,” said John, “you can’t get ’em in, so. They’ll have to be cut in little pieces.”

“Yes,” replied his mother; “but I think

I can paper them best in this way, and cut them up afterward. I must only be sure to let them dry perfectly, first."

So, for another half-hour, they went on busily with their cutting and pasting. By that time, the wooden slips were sufficiently well dried for handling, and John eagerly proposed to take them, and go on with his share of the work, as carpenter.

But Mrs. Osburn had a better way. She first requested John to mark, carefully, by measure, at each end of the box, the different spaces at which he wished the partitions to be set. There were to be two wide intervals, for large eggs; and then, by twos and threes, the spaces were to diminish gradually, until they were of the right proportions for such tiny specimens as those of the wren and the titmouse.

Now, Mrs. Osburn brought the inevitable "Spalding" into play. With this, delicately managed, she fastened each strip securely and invisibly into its place. Then she measured the spaces between, and after ruling

lines, at corresponding distances, along the slips of covered pasteboard, she cut them in pieces with a very sharp, strong pair of shears. These pieces, in their turn, were just touched on the edges with the glue, and pressed into their places; thus checking off the whole interior of the box into regular compartments of graduated size.

John looked on, eager and absorbed, until all was finished; only rendering assistance, now and then, by reaching to his mother the articles she was using; and especially by picking up the shears, which, as it is the nature of these implements to do, were continually sliding about.

“Why, mother!” he exclaimed, as he restored them to her lap for certainly the tenth time, “how they do keep dropping! They are determined to stay on the floor! I think you might as well keep them there.”

His mother laughed.

“It reminds me of Mr. Micawber and his friends,” said she. “I can only answer as one of them did.”

“What was that?” asked John.

“Oh,” replied Mrs. Osburn, “he was a very slippery sort of man in money matters, and always getting into difficulties. But he had rendered these friends of his a very important and generous service. So they were making a plan together, to provide for him. ‘But,’ said one of them, ‘before the time comes, he will be continually arrested, or taken in execution, for debt.’ ‘Then,’ replied Miss Betsey Trotwood, ‘he must be continually set free again, and taken out of execution.’ Now, my scissors — bright, easy-going Micawbers that they are — are continually sliding down hill; but, for the sake of their valuable service, all we can do is just to keep continually picking them up again.”

John laughed. His mother was very apt to amuse him in this way, with little pleasant illusions and sallies, when they were together. He hardly ever had a conversation with her, without some little mutual brushing up of wits.

“What book is that in?” he asked.

“Dickens’s ‘David Copperfield,’” replied his mother.

“I guess I should like to read it, should n’t I?”

“I *guess* you would. Only some things in it you might enjoy more when you are a little older. You would like Ham and Peggotty, and the house on the beach made out of the hull of an old vessel, and all that early part of the book, very much, now; and then there are the school stories; and Aunt Betsey, and Janet, and the donkeys; and Mr. Dick and his kite.”

“I mean to read it, right off,” said Johnnie, very nearly even diverted from his box, on the point of completion as it was. But, as his mother placed the last little square of pasteboard where it belonged, his whole mind came back, loyally.

“Mother, it’s bully!” he exclaimed.

Mrs. Osburn started back, with a funny gesture of being excessively shocked.

“It is *what*?” she ejaculated with an emphasis of dismay.

“Oh, well,” said Johnnie, “I’ll talk *lady-fashion*. It is,” — mincing up his mouth and turning his head on one side, — “it is perfectly e-elegant! — the swe-etest thing I ever saw in my life!”

“You didn’t learn that from me,” retorted his mother, laughing. “Now talk common-sense fashion. Are you really satisfied with it?”

“I wouldn’t take Howard’s for it, mother! And his cost five dollars.”

“A little that we contrive ourselves is often much more satisfactory than a great deal contrived for us,” said Mrs. Osburn. “I have thought sometimes, when I have turned and trimmed up an old dress, that I liked it a great deal better than if I had bought a new one, and had it made by my dress-maker.”

“But this is n’t old,” insisted Johnnie. “It’s new, and splendid! Don’t that soft, brown lining look nice, all the way through? I’ll get some black-walnut sawdust to put the eggs in. That’ll look first-rate among the brown squares, won’t it?”

“I don’t know,” said Mrs. Osburn, “whether it will be quite so appropriate in a box like this, as in one of walnut itself. It might scatter, too, and soil the lining.”

“That’s so,” said John. “But what can I have? They look so nice on a dark color. Cotton-wool don’t show them off, at all.”

“It should be something in keeping, I think, with the other coloring of the box,” said Mrs. Osburn. “What if you were to get some pretty specimens of moss, of different shades, and place your eggs on them. You might do it quite artistically; suiting the color of the moss to that of the egg;—for instance, the blue robin’s egg on delicate gray, the cream-colored partridge’s on dark green or brown, and light eggs, generally, on the darker tints, and *vice versa*.”

“That’ll be just the very thing!” exclaimed John. “I’ll have such a box as nobody else ever saw! I’ll go this afternoon and get the moss.”

“Only remember,” said his mother, “that

it will only do to use the dry kinds. That beautiful bright-green moss, that you see about the brook, would soil the box, and not keep its color, either. Besides, you don't want *conspicuous* shades,—only back-grounds to set off your eggs. They furnish the coloring. There are a great many pretty wood and rock-mosses, that would be well worth the trouble of obtaining. In this way, you will have two collections in one."

"And I won't tell a single living soul till it's all done! They'll see if I can't get up a box! There's more than one way to kill a cat, besides choking her to death with butter!"

And, electrifying his mother with this application of a proverb from Jacob's repertory, he capered off out of the room.

The box stood, for firm and thorough drying, in Mrs. Osburn's window-seat all the afternoon. Meanwhile, John searched wood and pasture for every possible pretty variety of moss.

The next day, after his mother was seated, for the morning, in her own apartment, he came to her with his basket, and began to display his specimens.

“See here, mother!” he exclaimed. “Look at these beautiful, broad pieces of light-green! I peeled them off a big rock in the High Pasture. And these little, crispy, gray bits, —aren’t they like frost on the window-panes?—I got off some trees in Farmer Simmons’s woods. And here’s a lot of dark brown; and there’s some splendid cup-moss, somewhere,” he added, lifting up the pieces, and searching deeper into the basket. “I wish I could take them all out on something.”

“Wait a minute,” said Mrs. Osburn, as she reached to the bell-cord near her, and pulled it.

“Jane,” she said, to the girl who answered the summons, “bring up, if you please, the large, old waiter from the dining-room closet.”

Upon this, when it came, John poured

out, comfortably, all his mosses, and proceeded to sort and select them.

“You will need to be very careful,” said his mother, “not to soil or scratch the lining of your box, in putting in the bits of moss. You must break the pieces a little smaller than the squares you wish to fill, and then finish the gaps with little choice scraps, such as you can select and fit in.”

“Yes,” replied John; “and then here’s another thing. A good many of these pieces are thin, and won’t fill the squares up high enough. They ought to be all even.”

“I can give you some cotton to put in, wherever it is necessary,” said Mrs. Osburn.

After two or three trials, and with little hints and helps from his mother, he became quite expert at arranging the squares.

He first selected the egg that was to occupy the space, and then the moss that would best contrast with and set it off. Then, from a large piece, he would break the most beautiful fragment, and lay it carefully in; filling up the corners and interstices

with little spires or scales or cups to correspond, and managing, usually, to make a little depression, or cradle, where the egg was to lie. Nothing could be prettier than some of these little beds, and the delicate-hued shells that rested in them. The contrasts of color—the blending and gradations of shade—were a real study; and he was very glad of having his mother’s eye and taste to appeal to. She quite forgot her own work; and the whole morning, nearly, slipped away, as they shifted and arranged and consulted and admired.

The effect of the whole, at last, was very beautiful.

“Where are you going to put it, Johnnie?” Mrs. Osburn asked. “It really is too pretty to be hidden away, or to be left where there will be any risk of injury. Hadn’t you better let me find a place for it downstairs?”

“Oh, no, mother!” replied John, eagerly; “it would n’t seem as if it were really my own. I can bring it down to show to people,

you know. I'll take good care of it in my room."

"As you do of all your other things! Ah, Johnnie!"

"Well, — I shall keep this all by itself, somewhere; in my wardrobe, I suppose. But I don't believe the drawers are long enough to hold it."

"One of them is," said his mother."

"Why!" exclaimed Johnnie, surprised.

"They're all just exactly alike."

"Are you sure? I think not."

"Oh, yes, I *know* they are. Just come and see."

Mrs. Osburn smiled as she rose from her seat and followed her son out of the room.

"There, mother!" and he confidently threw open the doors of his wardrobe, forgetting, in the triumph of showing he was right, to be ashamed of the disorder betrayed.

"And there, Johnnie!" repeated his mother.

She had stooped, and put her hand under

the bottom of the wardrobe, and now, as she spoke, slipped forward a long drawer, which occupied the whole size of the piece of furniture, and which John had never discovered.

“Why, mother!” he cried. “Why did n’t you ever tell me of that before?”

“Was it worth while to provide an additional lumber-place?”

John looked a little ashamed. He closed the wardrobe doors, to shut off the disarray from view, and said nothing.

“Well,” said Mrs. Osburn, “there you have a nice, separate place, where you can keep your eggs. I advise you not to throw in any old boots on the top of them!”

She made no further allusion to the state of things above, but left the leaven to work.

John brought his beautiful dark-green box, with its many-tinted contents, and placed it in the drawer. It occupied nearly all its width and half its length. A happy idea struck him of a use to be made of the remaining space. He took down from the

upper shelf, where he had hitherto kept his eggs, a number of pretty birds' nests, which he had found empty in his rambles, and brought home. These he laid in beside the box.

His specimens were all safely and beautifully arranged, at last.

“Order reigned in” at least one corner of “Warsaw.” But, somehow, as he turned away he was not entirely satisfied.

He could not forget how it was behind the doors.

CHAPTER XII.

REFORM.

No. John was very far from being satisfied. His first thought in the morning was of his beautiful collection of eggs; and he jumped from his bed to pull out the invisible drawer, uncover the handsome green box, and enjoy a fresh look at the order and perfection within.

Howard and Stephen came over, and admired as enthusiastically as he could wish. Still, the having one thing, and that only, complete and beautiful, discomforted him with a continual, secret uneasiness. He looked at it, and displayed it again and again; and wondered all the time, within himself, why he didn't enjoy it more, after all.

“ I'll empty out that old wardrobe, from

top to bottom, this very day, and fix it up ;” was the resolution he came to, at last, as he woke on the second morning, and found that it was raining, and no out-of-doors plan could be made.

It happened to be the very day, however, that Mr. Osburn had fixed for him to resume his lessons.

“ I wish, father,” said he, at breakfast, this fact having recurred to him, “ that I need n’t begin to study to-day.”

“ I dare say,” replied his father. “ But what better thing do you propose to do ? ”

“ I want to clear up my wardrobe ; it looks like everything.”

“ Oh, very well ! If you have set yourself that Herculean task, I certainly won’t impose any other upon you. Only, I shall expect to see one of two things accomplished when I return home, — perfect order in the wardrobe, and no traces visible of the process ; or, half-a-dozen examples in Compound Numbers correctly worked out and copied.”

John joyfully agreed to the conditions ;

although, perhaps, he hardly realized all that was involved in the phrase “no traces visible.” He found it to be no insignificant part of his pledge, when he had fairly investigated the multifarious accumulations that loaded shelves, drawers, and floor; and considered that these were not only to be cleared out, but disposed of.

Fortunately, it was Jane’s day for sweeping that part of the house; and she told him “not to mind the rubbish; but leave it all together on the floor, and she would take it away.”

So he first took down all his clothing from the hooks, and laid it on the bed. Then he got up in a chair, and explored the upper shelves. All sorts of things had been thrown up there from time to time, to find their own lodgment, and take care of themselves. It was a marvel how the box of eggs had escaped demolition, an hundred times. There was the tail of a kite, — a bow without a string, — some arrows, — a collapsed air-balloon, — his school satchel, — some straps and scraps of

leather, — a couple of odd socks, a blue and a white one, whereof the bereaved counterparts were thrust back disconsolately in one of his drawers, — the top stick of his missing slate-frame, with sponge and pencil attached, — and a further catalogue of similar things, which boys and their mothers can well imagine. Dust and fragments from the birds' nests and bits of cotton-wool were intermingled with all the rest; and when John had fairly faced it all, and glanced downward upon the like heterogeneous heap on the floor, he felt, for a moment, almost inclined to give it up, and go to his half-dozen examples in Compound Numbers.

It was well his father had imposed the alternative. His mind inclined, I say, for an instant, toward this; but then it recoiled again, and swung back to its first purpose.

“Ugh!” he ejaculated, half in despair, and half in determination.

And then he made a great onslaught upon the shelf next the top, which was most of

all chaotic, and brought down an armful of its accumulation, which he deposited upon the carpet. This operation he repeated, from point to point, till he had cleared shelves and floor of everything but dust.

Next, he proceeded to the task of assorting. He made three piles ; one of mere rubbish, which was to await Jane and her dust-pan for final disposition ; one of articles suitable to be replaced in his wardrobe ; and a third of such things as might be useful to him again at some time, and which he yet did not wish to have lumbering his shelves. These he must consult his mother about.

Borrowing a brush of Jane, he swept off the dust and scraps, and then put neatly away upon the upper shelf all that was worthy of replacement out of the confusion that had taken up three. Of the two that were left vacant, he appropriated the lower one, as being most accessible, to the bestowal of his school-books, slate, and copy-book.

“If they only looked nicer,” he said to himself, “I would ask my mother for that

little painted table up in the attic, and put them on it in my window here, so that I could sit right down to them every day, as Howard does."

But, for the present, he only piled them tidily together, on this lower shelf.

Then he went on to the emptying and arranging of his drawers. Here, also, he found that, when superfluities were removed, and articles folded and laid compactly, there remained two drawers quite clean and empty. One of these he concluded to take for such miscellaneous matters as he was sure to want, and as might be placed there in orderly fashion. Jane very kindly disentangled and wound for him his mass of string into a shapely ball, which he deposited in one corner with especial satisfaction; both for the convenience it would be to him to have it thus in readiness for use, and for the great relief he felt that it would no longer be spinning and snarling about everything else upon the premises.

Now the jackets and trousers and other

clothing remained to be hung in their places, and all would be complete. But some of these were soiled with dust and mud acquired in recent expeditions, and had been hastily hung up without proper attention. He could not be content to put them back in this state, where everything else had assumed an aspect of neatness and regularity. So he took them to his window, which overlooked the flat roof of a back piazza, and hung them out across the sill. Then he obtained a clothes-broom from his mother's dressing-room, with which he sprang out upon the piazza roof, and rubbed and brushed away at the dangling legs, till they were restored to very tolerable cleanliness; and at last, he disposed of them all upon their separate hooks; the nicer garments upon one side, and the older ones, — his “rampaging suits,” as he called them, — upon the other, with his little dressing-gown and night-gown at the back. Shoes and slippers he set side by side upon the floor; and then with a long breath of intense self-congratulation, he surveyed what he had done.

The wearisome little imp — Disorder — was cast out at last.

One little spot made beautiful had ended so in beautifying all the rest.

Was it not like the working of one little good in character?

“Mother,” said John, reporting himself a few minutes afterward in Mrs. Osburn’s room, “I’ve got it all to rights, and it looks first-rate. But there’s a parcel of stuff, — odds and ends, you know, — that I haven’t any place to put. Can’t I have an empty box in the attic to stow them away in, and keep up there until I want them? I can’t get along without some sort of a lumber-place.”

“I suppose not,” said his mother, smiling. “I find it so myself. But then, I keep my lumber-place as tidy, in its way, as any other part of the house, especially since a certain member of the family has been forbidden to go there.”

“Well, mother, I won’t rummage, nor throw things about. Truly. I’ll only have a box there to keep my own things in.”

“Very well. I will try you. You will find, at the head of the stairs, a soap-box that has just been emptied. You may have that. But I advise you to put away your things as nicely in it as you would in your wardrobe. You will find the advantage when you go to look for anything. Besides, a truly orderly person is orderly *out of sight*.”

“Oh, yes, mother; I don’t mean to have any *clutter* anywhere. I couldn’t bear it, having my drawer of eggs so nice, and things all topsy-turvy above. It seems like a kind of a lie.”

“I was waiting and hoping for something of this kind, Johnnie,” said his mother, looking very deeply pleased. “I had made up my mind not to interfere any more with remonstrances, but to let you learn, as I was sure you would, somehow, the beauty of a better way.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LEAVEN WORKS.

“MOTHER,” said John, “could n’t I have a new set of school-books, before I go to the Academy?”

“Do you mean new copies of those you already have?”

“Yes, mother. My ‘Greenleaf’ is horrid. And my geography has had ink spilt on the cover. And then I *must* have a new slate and a copy-book. I wish father would get them for me, right off; and then I would have things all nice in my piazza-window, just as How’ Sellinger has. I shouldn’t mind studying half so much. But I do hate so to take down those *looking* things to study with!”

“I am heartily glad, Johnnie, that you have begun to weary of untidiness. But,

for all that, I do not think I ought to encourage you to throw aside what was bought for you so little while ago. You will, undoubtedly, be obliged to have some new, additional books, when you begin at a new school, and the expense of furnishing them will be quite enough. No, you will have to smooth out the old ones as well as you can.”

“Oh, dear, mother! There’s no such thing as ‘smooth’ to ’em! And then my slate-frame is gone. I *can’t* fix ’em up!”

“Smooth your face, Johnnie. And then bring all the things here. We’ll look them over, and see what can be done.”

John went to his room, and brought back his whole collection in his arms.

“There, mother!” he exclaimed as he let them all fall upon her sofa; “Did you ever see such a miserable lot? All my property is in *calamities*, as that man told father!”

“Let us just see how much of it can be redeemed,” said his mother, laughing. “In the first place, I think we can find the rest

of the slate frame; and that, with your excellent carpentry, can soon be replaced. In the general picking-up about the house, after we moved in, I dare say it may have been carried off, with other etceteras, to the attic. There is a great box which stands just beyond the pile of carpeting, in one corner, in which Jane gathered up all sorts of things that were too good to burn or throw away; and if you look there, you may very likely find the other pieces."

"Well," said Johnnie, with not much animation, "but then, there are the books. Carpentry won't help them any."

"One thing at a time," replied Mrs. Osburn. "Go and look for the slate-frame."

With a sort of vague confidence in his mother's universal powers of restoration, and almost of creation, John obeyed.

Singularly enough, the very topmost article upon the box was a side-piece of the missing frame. By removing a few bulky things, and searching deeper, he found, with very little delay, the others.

“But, mother,” said he, “it’s all notched, and stained with ink. And it’s got my name printed at both ends. I left out the ‘r’ the first time.”

“Carpentry will remedy the first trouble. And then there is some very dark-brown paint, I think at the stable. You might paint the frame over.”

“So I can,” assented John, quite gleefully. Unless it be a hammer and nails, there is nothing a boy likes better to experiment with than a pot of paint and a brush.

“This is such a little job, mother,” he said, “mayn’t I bring my things in here, and do it? All I want is a knife, and a sliver of wood to make pegs of.”

“You may bring up the waiter that you used the other day for the mosses. And then you may get what you need from the barn, — paint and all.”

John hastened off. His zeal in the matter was fully awakened, now. In a very few minutes, all the articles were collected, and he set eagerly to work.

While he was thus busied, Mrs. Osburn, with a paper-folder, smoothed out, patiently, the turned-up corners of his books, leaf by leaf; and then, going into her husband's little library, she placed the volumes under his heavy paper-press, which she screwed down tightly, and so left them for a while.

Then she turned her attention to the copy-book. There was still enough fair paper left to be written over to make it well worth using, at least until he should begin at school. But the scrawls and blots in the early part were simply disheartening.

Mrs. Osburn, however, was not without a resource. She produced from her "Om-nium Gatherum," as she called a small, shallow closet of shelves in her room, some sheets of colored paper, from which she selected one of a bright green shade. With a needle and thread, she basted together the defaced leaves of the book, fastening them back at the same time to the cover. Then she cut and fitted the green paper, so as to make a nice, fresh covering to the whole, — folding it in, the en-

tire breadth of the book, and so concealing behind it all but the fair sheets that remained to be written. She pasted it down, carefully, with mucilage, and then laid it away under the other books in the press.

“Mother,” said John, “I’m all ready to paint. But how shall I set up the slate, so as to paint all round at once?”

“There is a tall, round, tin box in the closet, with some tacks in it,” said his mother, after thinking a moment. “You may use that. Rest the middle of the slate upon it, and paint one side at a time. If you are careful, you can turn it over without touching the frame. But, wait a minute,” she added, looking at the paint-pot; “I think I can make that a better color. Run down and ask Jane for her box of red ochre that she uses for the bricks.”

This obtained, she took a little from it upon the end of her paper-folder, and dropped it into the paint, stirring it in with the brush. Trying it upon a bit of wood, she then shook in a little more. Now it became of a fine, dark reddish-brown, or mahogany color.

“That will do,” she said. “I think you’ll have quite an elegant frame, after all.”

John painted, and turned, and painted again. Meantime, his mother made one more search in his behalf, and brought forth some nice, strong, dark-gray linen, from a drawer. She removed his books from the press, and made pretty covers for them with this, pasting it down firmly, inside, with mucilage. Then, she cut squares of white paper, and printed upon them the titles, clearly, with pen and ink. These she gummed across the backs of the volumes. Now, for a while, to prevent relapse, they must return into the press again. But first, John seized them, and lifted up his voice in a great rejoicing.

“Why, mother,” he exclaimed, you’ve made them all over new! They’re splendid! I’d rather keep them now, than not!”

“I suppose we shall say so of all our ‘calamities,’ Johnnie, when we have once found out how to make the best of them.”

When the slate-frame was dry, John var-

nished it. It was now really very handsome. His mother gave him a crimson silk cord, and with this he fastened a new pencil and piece of sponge to the top.

By the time all this was accomplished, the books, too, were ready. They had remained nearly two days in the press, and the leaves were thoroughly straightened into their places.

Mrs. Osburn consented that he should have the painted table for his window, and gave him a little Turkey-red table-cover with a bright border.

You can't think what an air of cheerfulness seemed to break out over everything in John's room, when he had set this in its place, at right angles to the window, and arranged upon it all his nice, dark-covered books. His Atlas, covered to match, lay in front. On this, his copy-book, contrasting pleasantly, with its outside of brilliant green; and then his slate, with its shiny, mahogany colored frame and crimson cord.

All spoke of daily occupancy and pleas-

ant work. He drew up his chair before it, and sat down.

Opposite, at his right hand, was the wardrobe, with its gloss of freshness still upon it, and, as John knew, in perfect order within, from top to bottom. Yes, — to his precious box of eggs, that lay there safely, in all its beauty, and had truly been at the bottom of the great reform.

His story-books were on a tiny set of hanging shelves, in the middle space of the wall at one side of the wardrobe. These, also, he had collected, astray in corners about the house, and replaced compactly. Upon the opposite space of wall his mother had hung a beautiful Bible picture, — the Calling of Samuel.

This little ante-room, before the arch, looked now like a sort of library. All the sleeping and dressing arrangements were beyond.

He brought his little Bible from the bookshelf, and laid it with his school-books, for every-day use. The like placing of Howard's had silently spoken its lesson.

All these may seem very trifling details; but it was just by means of these that the “little leaven,” which was precisely what he needed, got into Johnnie’s life.

“You *must* pick up your things, Johnnie!”
“You really ought not to leave everything about so!”

“Master Johnnie, it’s a shame for you to make such a clutter!” “Your clothes are in *such* confusion!”

Reproofs and remonstrances like these, unavoidable as they were, had come to give John only a general sense of discomfort, and of the necessity for a certain external acquiescence, which he always felt as an interruption and a “bother.” He had learned, as he could not help but learn, from his constant experience, that Disorder was a bad thing; but the absolute good of perfect and prevailing Order, as available to himself, he had never before seized hold of and taken in.

Radiating from the pleasant little room, went forth, now, a sunny influence of im

provement, over his whole daily life. His lessons were punctually and carefully prepared, and then the cheerfulness of "duty done" went with him into his other occupations. He was more observant of personal neatness. He grew more careful of his clothes. He became unwilling to hang away anything that he had soiled or torn among garments that were nice and ready for wearing.

He enjoyed, more than ever, visiting Howard Sellinger in his room, and noticing all his nice and ingenious arrangements. He felt, all the while, that he had something to return to at home that was not unworthy in the comparison. So good, in all things, draws to good, to be encouraged and confirmed; while evil shrinks away, uneasy and ashamed.

Week after week, the same instinct of thoroughness, — of having all in keeping, — of Truth and Order, in short, — worked insensibly, into other things.

The quietness and beauty of his own little room had come to seem like a presence there,

that reproved him, if he went into it after having given way to selfishness or ill-temper with Kathie or the servants.

Coming, nicely dressed,—as he now did oftener than he used,—into the drawing-room for a moment, to find a lady sitting with his mother, perhaps ; greeting her in the courteous manner he had been taught, and catching, as he did sometimes, a word in praise of his “gentlemanliness,” as he departed ; how could he but be reminded, if he had, in any impatience or disappointment, spoken disrespectfully to his mother, when he had been alone with her, but a little while before?

Such contradictions came to press upon him painfully, whenever they were evident ; for John was an innately truthful boy. He came to feel, in an instance of the sort, that it was “a kind of a lie,” as he had said of the old disorder in his wardrobe. And so, he could not contentedly rest in the consciousness of one point of improvement made,—letting all the rest go. The order-

ing of character would be, now, like the other ordering. Once begun, he would never be able to leave off till every corner should be cleaned out, the last speck of dust and rubbish swept away, and all set fair and true, "from top to bottom."

There was a rapid and marked development of good in him, during these bright weeks of late summer and early autumn.

He had passed a birthday, now, and was, in his twelfth year. He had been examined, and entered into the Academy; taking rank in a class of boys among whom were several considerably older than himself. His ambition was awakened to hold his place, and do himself credit. All things seemed to work together, — a single right impetus once given, — to incite and help him to improve.

He liked to keep his Bible upon his study-table, among his other books of daily use. It had given him a stronger feeling of liking and respect for Howard, from the moment he had noticed his so placed. But the keeping it there was but a daily hypocrisy, if it

remained unopened. If he had had no other motive, he was too true for that. And so, he came to reading it regularly and faithfully every morning, as he felt sure Howard did.

Do you see how a boy, unconsciously and silently, acknowledged his Master, and let his light shine?

Do you see how the leaven of a little thing was working to great good?

One beautiful, golden afternoon in early September, the Sellingers all came over to take tea with the Osburns.

Professor Sellinger had been staying, for a day or two, at his brother's house, and he and Howard were to leave Chequasset the next morning, and return to New York.

The three boys had very nearly monopolized him during his stay; and very willingly monopolized he was. He had gone over all their favorite walks and wood-haunts with them, and had found new beauties for them, and opened their eyes to new knowledge at almost every step.

Now, -- while the other older members of the party were gathered in the great upper hall, near what Mrs. Osburn had named her "sunset window," and, quietly seated there, were enjoying what Johnnie called "grown folks' talk," -- the boys had laid violent hands upon the Professor, and carried him off to the brook, to see or explain some new wonder.

The truth was, they must needs keep up some constant little bustle and excitement, lest the thought of these last hours of their pleasant summer companionship should come back upon them with too unwelcome a reminder.

"Jest look there," cried Jacob, as he met them coming back over Cedar Bridge; "in that air patch o' corn! Ther's a reg'lar camp-meetin' o' swallers! Or a caucus, -- I donno which. Anyhow, they're settlin' matters up, -- sperritooal or p'litical; an' in a few days more, they 'll all be off."

"Oh, dear, me!" sighed Johnnie, "all the nice things are going together! It don't

seem as if it could be time for the birds to go. It isn't a minute, hardly, since they were building their mud nests.”

“ We've had many a good time since then, though,” said Stephen.

Yes, — the swallows were truly holding a fall convention. It was a little late, even now, for it. But the summer days had been beautifully prolonged, this year, and scarcely a chill wind or a storm had come, as yet, to remind them of their flitting-time.

Johnnie almost forgot to be sorry, presently, in watching them. Fluttering up and down over the corn-patch, — settling in close groups among its stalks, — coming, in ceaseless accessions, from every direction, — it seemed as if all the birds, for miles around, were gathering to this one spot. The whirl of their numberless wings, their eager chatter, and incessant wheelings and shiftings, were exceedingly curious and exciting to listen to and behold.

“ I'm afraid my mother won't see them,” exclaimed Johnnie, suddenly; and he started off, in great haste, toward the house.

The next moment his voice sounded from the foot of the front staircase.

“Mother! There’s such a lot of swallows, out in the corn-patch, as you never saw! It’s black with ’em, and they’re coming all the time! Go out to my room, please; you can see them nicely from there.”

And then he ran back to the Professor and the boys.

He was neither afraid nor ashamed, now, to ask his mother and her friends to go into his room.

Mrs. Osburn led the way around, through her dressing-room, to John’s chamber; whence, as he had said, they could look directly down upon the corn-patch, and the restless flock of birds.

“Yes,” said Mr. Osburn, “Johnnie has got to part with his swallows. With all his ornithological researches, I don’t think any have interested him more than they. He has watched them through the whole season. They were building when we first came here.”

“Is this John’s room?” asked Mr. Sellinger, looking about him with real interest and admiration. The sun had gone round from that end of the house, and the blinds were thrown open. The soft, mellow scent of the air, and the bright afternoon glow from sky and landscape, poured in and pervaded the chamber. The pure light fell upon nothing discrepant or unsightly. There were some added embellishments since the day of the grand revolutionizing that we know of. In each window hung a little pot of German ivy, that Mrs. Osburn had given Johnnie from a number that she had been raising. A great, beautiful, many-horned, pink-lined shell—a piece of John’s property, given him by an old ship-master, an acquaintance of Mr. Osburn, and reclaimed from some other corner of the house to place here—stood upon a little bracket, and held a few bright-leaved sprays of a trailing vine that John had already discovered in a wood walk. Some large, curious birds’-nests,—too large for the drawer,—with the mossy boughs upon

which they were built, had been fastened against the walls.

"Is this John's room? What a very sumptuous suit of apartments! He must be a proud and happy boy here. But all his arrangements declare that."

"Yes," said Mr. Osburn, "Johnnie has, somehow, been inoculated with the love of order, I think."

"Not inoculated," replied his wife. "Morally, that process doesn't often succeed. He has *taken* it the natural way, from Howard Sellinger."

"Howard, certainly, has been of great good to him," said Mr. Osburn.

"Yes," said Mrs. Osburn, "it began with that egg-collecting. Johnnie could n't arrange those beautiful things with the method and care he has done, and be content with incongruity elsewhere. From one thing to another, he has gone on, reforming his fashions; and improving, I can very well see, in many other ways."

"That's the secret," said Mr. Sellinger. "If

we can only get just one thing right, in or outside of us, it is n't in our nature to rest until all is so. ‘A little leaven leavens the whole lump.’”

“And if one life shines, the next life to it must catch the light.”

“All we have to do, any of us, I think,” said Mrs. Sellinger, “is just to shine. I have long since made up my mind that the only real good, great or small, is communicated so, from life to life. We take from one, and pass on to another. It is the infection of excellence.”

“You touch the border of a great truth,” said the minister, reverently; “it is the Leaven of the Kingdom,—the Christ-work in the world. The true apostleship and spiritual succession.”

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